

TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY
Special Meeting of November 10, 2016

Present: Mr. Carrier, Ms. Hess, Ms. Moulding, Ms. Reall, Ms. Sheirer, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight. **Also Present:** Members of the Search Committee Dylan Gaffney, Martha McCormick, Molly Moss, and Serena Smith. Members of the public.

The meeting began at 3:15 PM in the Coolidge Room.

Secretary's Report

Ms. Hess moved that the Secretary's reports of the candidate interviews of October 7, October 13, October 20, and October 24 be accepted and placed on file. Ms. Wight seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Ms. Hess introduced the search committee, which includes herself and Mr. Carrier as representatives of the Trustees, staff members Molly Moss and Dylan Gaffney, and Friends of Forbes board members Martha McCormick and Serena Smith. She thanked the search committee for all their work and especially Ms. Moss and Mr. Gaffney for the administrative work they did. She thanked Ms. Sheirer for taking notes at all the interviews and the library staff for their level of involvement in the process and for submitting comments and feedback. She thanked the community for their attendance at the meetings and for the feedback they sent to the Trustees. She said the process began in July and included reviewing the job description and advertising for the position. The search committee conducted preliminary phone and skype interviews and brought in four candidates for interviews in October.

Search Committee Comments

Mr. Carrier asked the search committee for their recommendations. Ms. Moss spoke first and said she was honored to be on the search committee and took their charge very seriously. She spent a whole day with each candidate and saw them in a variety of settings, interacting with staff, Trustees, and the public. She said the most relevant sentence in the job advertisement said that Forbes is "seeking a creative, energetic leader committed to public service, with a respect for the past combined with a vision and understanding of the role of the public library in the 21st century." They should offer "a vision for the future, oversee preservation and maintenance of the library's collections, buildings and physical assets, and represent and advocate for the library." She said that all aspects of Ms. Downing's application and interview exceeded her expectations. Her relationships with staff and the community, her patience and dedication, her commitment to public service and work in adult programming have played a strong role in Forbes becoming a vibrant community space that is welcoming to all members of the community. Throughout the search process, she has heard from library staff and members of the community and she strongly and enthusiastically supports Ms. Downing for the position of Library Director.

Mr. Gaffney spoke next and said that he is grateful to be involved in the process and he seriously considered all the applicants. He said the search committee received very valuable feedback from the staff and public. Without hesitation, he said Ms. Downing showed herself to be the most qualified and inspired candidate and the clear choice to lead Forbes Library. Ms. Downing has communicated in action and words how much she values the library's role as a community center. She has been an inspiration, an example, and leader. She has consistently and positively encouraged staff to embrace challenges. She has been clear in emphasizing the library's mission of public service and

Search Committee Comments (continued)

improving accessibility while remaining positive in times of fiscal uncertainty. She has encouraged staff to share new ideas and to look for ways to engage the public, collaborate, and build community. He said Ms. Downing is uniquely qualified to lead Forbes, with the experience, temperament, leadership, and values to expand outreach and engagement with communities in need, to bring real change where needed, and to build on the library's role as an educational resource, community center, and leader for the future.

Ms. McCormick thanked the Trustees for including her on the search committee. She said that all four finalists have something to offer Forbes, however Ms. Downing is her only recommendation for the position of Library Director. Not only does she have the experience and necessary qualifications set forth by the committee, but she also has the experience of knowing Forbes inside and out. She is respected by the staff, has an outgoing personality and an easy manner that everyone, from all walks of life can relate to. She is mindful of the role of director of reaching out to the community and she is perfectly suited for this aspect of the job. Ms. McCormick's experience with her as a Friends member has been fantastic. She always finds a way to make things work and appreciates and acknowledges the work of others. The library will be well served with Ms. Downing at the helm.

Ms. Smith said that Ms. Downing is also her first choice for Library Director. Among the 28 applicants for the job, there were several who had strong backgrounds in public library experience, several who expressed great enthusiasm for the institution of public libraries in general, and some who looked as if they could be strong leaders. Ms. Downing has all of these qualities and she has a wonderful outgoing personality to match. Her personal experience with Ms. Downing has only been about six years, but she quickly discovered that she is exceptional. She responds in a timely fashion to every question or request for help. She masters the details of every project and imparts her knowledge with patience and good cheer. She is unfailingly approachable and welcoming and the Friends know they can always depend on her help and advice.

Ms. Hess said that in evaluating the candidates she looked at four things. First, did they meet the qualifications in the advertisement, which included an MLS from an ALA accredited institution; 3-5 years of increasingly responsible management/supervisory experience in a public library; leadership ability, and a high degree of motivation, initiative, and resourcefulness; ability to create budgets and manage finances; and ability to speak and write effectively. Secondly, was this candidate "a creative, energetic leader committed to public service, with a respect for the past combined with a vision and understanding of the role of the public library in the 21st century." Thirdly, does this person support the library staff, not just with an open-door policy, but a person who creates an atmosphere in which staff feel a sense of ownership, pride, and responsibility. And lastly, does this person understand the role of the public library in the community, a role that includes both reaching out to and listening and learning from the community. Ms. Hess said all of the candidates were passionate advocates for public libraries and each had strengths that made them an excellent librarian. Ms. Downing stood out as the one candidate who could best lead Forbes, bring out the best in the staff, and provide the best service to the community. She recommended that the position of Library Director be offered to Ms. Downing.

Mr. Carrier said that the Forbes Trustees have many important duties and among them is to ensure the library for the future generations of Northampton residents. The Trustees must keep the library safe from all outside political

Search Committee Comments (continued)

interference, and fulfill fiduciary and stewardship responsibilities by overseeing the endowment, maintaining the building and grounds, building collections, employing an able staff, keeping the library open and welcoming to the public as much as possible, and making sure the library is both vibrant and relevant in changing times. Selecting the right Director is central to making sure this all happens. Over the years, Mr. Carrier has developed a much better understanding of what he wants in a library director. He wants to know that the library is in good hands. In all situations, he wants to know he is dealing with an experienced individual with their feet planted firmly on the ground, someone who attends to the details without becoming immobilized by them, someone who listens to all sides and then makes clear decisions and sound recommendations whether dealing with patrons, the staff, the mayor, or the board of Trustees. Throughout the search process, the clear consensus is that while there are some areas that can be tweaked, most people believe the library is on track. While all finalists have pieces of what he seeks, Ms. Downing clearly stands out. She has served as Assistant Director and Patron Services Librarian of Forbes for 12 years. During that time, she has learned and grown, and is prepared to be Library Director. She was fortunate to have Ms. Moulding, one of the library's finest directors, as her mentor. He has worked closely with both of them as they struggled with numerous problems and difficult situations. He concurs with the search committee that Ms. Downing is more than ready to assume the duties of Library Director and he urges the board to vote to make that happen.

Public Comments

Susan Enz said that she sincerely believes Ms. Downing to be the best candidate. She is compassionate towards the underserved population, and has a lot of patience with the public. She is always responsive to suggestions and willing to listen.

Nancy Dubin said that she herself is a retired librarian. She has not known Ms. Downing for very long, but she is a person with special compassion for people including the homeless, which is especially important at this time due to recent events. When asked about the 21st century, she spoke about the digital divide and hit the nail on the head. She is very impressed with Ms. Downing who is young, but also very mature. She has only heard good things about her from the community.

Barbara Wurtzel said she is also a retired librarian. She read the feedback she sent the Trustees saying that Ms. Downing has demonstrated integrity and a commitment to public service. She has given staff opportunities and supports teamwork and new initiatives. She has the ability to identify resources, a good sense of humor, and supports the Trustees and staff. Four very interesting candidates were presented, but Ms. Downing is the strongest.

Mr. Carrier thanked the public for their comments and said that the Trustees had received and thoroughly read all their feedback.

Trustees Comments

Ms. Wight said that the Trustees are elected by the public to represent them and to make decisions on their behalf. She thanked everyone for their feedback and considers Ms. Downing the right person for the job.

Ms. Reall thanked the search committee for the thorough and thoughtful process. Four terrific candidates came to Northampton to spend the day, and go through exhaustive questioning and interfacing with staff. The response from

Trustees Comments (continued)

the community shows her how important Forbes is and how much people care about how the library operates and serves the inhabitants of Northampton. She has known Ms. Downing for a number of years and watched her grow and evolve. One thing that has not changed is her unwavering commitment to Forbes and the people it serves. Ms. Downing stood out from the external candidates with her great personality, winning ways, great ideas, and creativity. She is always looking for new ways to make things better. She thanked Ms. Moulding for doing such a good job mentoring Ms. Downing and helping her to grow and develop. She enthusiastically endorsed Ms. Downing for the position of Library Director.

Mr. Twarog thanked the search committee and encouraged a round of applause. He was unable to attend all of the interviews but read all the correspondence, notes, and public and staff comments. He said Forbes is a vibrant institution and public libraries are a measure of civilization and a place we honor. He was saddened when he learned of Ms. Moulding's retirement, and the new Director will have big shoes to fill. Ms. Downing is far above other candidates and he endorses her for the position.

Mr. Carrier said that it has been a difficult last couple of days. Thinking about this institution, why we are here and what we believe in, we can take consolation in knowing we live in this community with so many great people.

Ms. Hess made a motion to offer Ms. Downing the position of Library Director effective as of January 1, 2017. Mr. Twarog seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Mr. Carrier asked Ms. Moss to go and find Ms. Downing and ask her to join the meeting. Ms. Downing joined the meeting at 3:40 PM. On behalf of the Trustees, Mr. Carrier offered Ms. Downing the position of Library Director effective January 1, 2017.

Ms. Downing said it was an amazing honor and she accepted the offer. She said she hoped it had been clear that this was her dream job. She is committed to the community, the staff, the Trustees, the Friends, and everyone Forbes serves. She has been humbled by the support she has received and excited about the future. She has big shoes to fill and thanked Ms. Moulding for tutoring her through the years. She thanked everyone for their support during this process.

Director's Contract

At 3:44 PM, Mr. Twarog moved that the Trustees go into executive session to discuss strategy in preparation for negotiation with the candidate for Library Director because discussion in open session would compromise the library's negotiating position. Ms. Wight seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously, with Mr. Carrier, Ms. Hess, Ms. Moulding, Ms. Reall, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor. The Trustees invited Ms. Moulding and Ms. Sheirer to remain as guests at the executive session. All others left the meeting at 3:44 PM. Mr. Carrier, Ms. Downing, Ms. Hess, Ms. Moulding, Ms. Reall, Ms. Sheirer, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight were present during the executive session. No votes were taken during the executive session.

At 3:55 PM, Mr. Twarog moved that the executive session be ended and the regular meeting reconvened. Ms. Reall seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously, with Mr. Carrier, Ms. Hess, Ms. Reall, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

At 3:55 PM, Ms. Hess moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Wight seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 PM.