

TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY
Thursday, March 23, 2023

Present: Ms. Debin Bruce, Mr. Russell Carrier, Ms. Lisa Downing, Ms. Molly Moss, Ms. Emily Prabhaker, Ms. Elizabeth Sheirer, Mr. Joseph Twarog, Ms. Katy Wight. **Also Present:** Julie Bartlett Nelson, Archivist; Scott Monroe, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library; Martha McCormick, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library. **Present via Zoom:** Heather Diaz, representative of the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA). **Absent:** None.

Pursuant to Governor Baker's Emergency Order Modifying the State's Open Meeting Law issued March 12, 2020, this meeting was held using remote participation via Zoom teleconferencing for some participants as indicated.

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM.

Bills & Warrants

The trustees signed the warrant dated March 23, 2023.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Secretary's Report

Ms. Prabhaker moved that the Secretary's report of February 21, 2023 be accepted and placed on file. Ms. Bruce seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Ms. Prabhaker has decided not to seek another term and will not be running for re-election in the fall. Official papers will be available in late April. Ms. Downing will write a press release once it is known how many open seats there will be.

Treasurer's Report

Ms. Downing distributed the Treasurer's Report for the month ending February 28, 2023 prepared by Ms. Buckhout. The General Aid Fund had positive net activity for the month of \$46,963 and has a balance of \$34,404. The Book & Media Fund had negative net activity of \$14,936 and has a balance of \$27,594. The Auxiliary Fund had positive net activity of \$356 and has a balance of \$932. The Doland Reference Room Fund had negative net activity of \$2,101 and has a deficit of \$8,967. The Externally Financed Transactions Fund had negative net activity of \$787 and has a balance of \$2,681. The Halberstadt Technology Fund had positive net activity of \$946 and has a balance of \$14,243. The Harding Fund for Local History has a zero balance. The Keogh Family Bequests Fund has a zero balance. The Morin Fund had negative net activity of \$8,127 and has a balance of \$108,823. The Rosamond Chester Coolidge Fund has a balance of \$2,335. The Watson Copier Fund had positive net activity of \$299 and has a balance of \$3,181. The value of the endowment as of February 28, 2023 was \$584,927.80. Ms. Downing said that she is thankful for the extra time that Ms. Buckhout has been putting in while the new Treasurer comes up to speed.

Ms. Wight made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report for the month ending February 28, 2023 and place it on file. Mr. Twarog seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Treasurer's Report (continued)

Mr. Twarog made a motion to transfer \$12,500 from the endowment to the Doland Fund in the operating account to complete the previously planned distribution for FY23. Ms. Bruce seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Gifts, Donations, and Bequests, etc.

Ms. Downing submitted a list of undesignated gifts received from multiple donors since the last trustees' meeting with \$3,506.05 going to the Morin Fund and \$50 to the Lyman Special Collections Fund.

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

Ms. Prabhaker made a motion to approve the undesignated gifts as proposed by Ms. Downing. Mr. Twarog seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Update on FY24 Budget

Ms. Downing reported that she, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Wight, and Ms. Moss met with the Mayor and her team to review the library's FY24 budget requesting a 3.5% increase, which represents a level services budget. She included a letter that summarized the library's position and the topics of discussion. The letter thanked the Mayor for the city's support in providing ARPA funds for one-time staff bonuses and the recent award to help Forbes build a performance stage. It also expressed gratitude for the city's initiatives to strengthen the community's social safety net through the Resilience Hub and Department of Community Care. The letter also talked about the stress of inflation on the library's budget, especially in the cost electricity which has risen 38%. Last year, library staff settled for a 2% cost of living increase and staff are understandably very concerned about that. A letter from the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA) was included and also sent to the Mayor. Ms. Downing requested that the city not push the basement HVAC and children's renovation project out any further on the capital improvement projects list, as they address critical air quality issues and children and teen programming needs in the near future. She also requested that the city allow Forbes employees to contribute to the 457 SMART plan (Save Money And Retire Tomorrow) that is available to city employees. Ms. Downing and Mr. Carrier said it was a very positive meeting and that the Mayor said she would do her best to fully fund the requested budget.

Department Report: Coolidge Museum and Local History

Ms. Nelson presented 2022 highlights for the Calvin Coolidge Presidential Library and Museum (CCPLM) and the Hampshire Local History Room. Argus, a new content management system is now in place, with the migration from Past Perfect and Omeka taking place during 2022. This was a large undertaking done with no additional staffing. Forbes received 3 Conserv monitors for environmental monitoring through an MBLC grant awarded in February 2022. This is a 3-year program to measure temperature, humidity and light levels in the Hampshire Room, Coolidge Museum and Coolidge Office. Data so far shows that the Coolidge office is colder and difficult to maintain consistent temperature in all seasons. Since the pandemic, staff have been providing access to the collections in person, by email, mail, and video calls. Patrons have gained increased comfort with receiving and using materials digitally and having live, interactive video appointments with library staff. The

Department Report: Coolidge Museum and Local History (continued)

Coolidge Museum was open 10 more hours per week in 2022 with the help of work-study students. In 2022 programming was predominantly online with some small in person programs. Coolidge Museum capacity was at 30 in 2021 and raised to 50 in the summer of 2022, and in 2023 will return to 75. A Mass Humanities grant to provide new equipment in the Coolidge Museum for hybrid programming was received in 2021-2022. Dylan Gaffney has continued to work on collecting and documenting music in Northampton. A Bay State Hotel channel on YouTube now features some items that have been digitized. Forbes is actively collecting in this area and using Moving Memories Lab grant equipment to digitize audio and video materials. Mr. Gaffney also maintains a partnership with Internet Archive to contribute materials from the Forbes Library collection. In 2022, the Forbes Library Alternative Press Collection was added with the assistance of Smith College work-study students and a new book scanner funded by the Friends of Forbes. Forbes is also part of a 2-year National Historical Publications & Records Commission (NHPRC) grant to digitize the Judd Manuscript, which is expected to take place at the Boston Public Library during summer 2023 through summer 2024 with materials accessible online in 2025. Crowd-sourcing will be employed to help decipher the 1830-1850 handwriting of Sylvester Judd. Mr. Gaffney is also leading work on the Documenting Early Black Lives in the Connecticut River Valley project, to document and share materials from the collection on early black lives, both enslaved and free, and their enslavers. Volunteers are assisting with this work. The CCPLM received a Conservation Assessment Program Grant for FY23, with an onsite visit from an assessor planned for summer 2023 to look at storage needs and special collections spaces. The Coolidge Standing Committee continues to meet on Zoom. An Exhibits subcommittee was formed in early 2022 to begin imagining and planning for a renovation of the Coolidge Museum with the help of Beth Myers, head of Special Collections at Smith. The next step is to investigate and apply for planning grants to work with consultants and designers. The Presidents Book Club continues to meet online and will conclude the chronological order in Fall 2023. The 100th anniversary of Coolidge's Presidency will be celebrated in 2023 with lectures, events, walking tours and more.

In response to a question from Mr. Twarog about the Native American headdress in the Coolidge collection, Ms. Nelson said that the guidelines around indigenous objects have recently changed and Forbes is no longer in compliance. The library will seek guidance on this issue and will come into compliance by 2026. Ms. Bruce said she had heard positive things about the new Argus system from Historic Northampton. In response to a question from Mr. Carrier, Ms. Nelson said that there are other manuscripts in addition to the Judd Manuscript to be digitized. She said that smaller projects can be done in-house, while larger projects, or projects with physical conservation issues, are best done with outside help. Mr. Carrier said that the trustees and the Friends have worked together on projects like this in the past, and to bring them forward when needed. Mr. Carrier also asked that the record reflect the trustees' appreciation for all the terrific work done by Mr. Gaffney, and for his upcoming talk at the Friends annual meeting. In response to a question from Ms. Wight, Ms. Nelson said that the current open round of Mellon grants are not suitable for Forbes, but that a new grant cycle will be open for applications in June for which Forbes will be better suited. In addition, the NHPRC will announce grants in July. The trustees thanked Ms. Nelson for her report, and she left the meeting at 4:27 PM.

Friends of Forbes

Ms. Wight attended the March 1 meeting of the Friends of Forbes and reported that Ms. Downing shared the branding designs presented to the trustees at last month's meeting and received their feedback. The Friends are planning for the Artisan's Fair next fall and hope to send out a call to artists and sponsors in March. They are doing a fundraiser with Provisions again during national library week as well as a raffle of book-related things. The Finance Committee is moving cash balances to the endowment. Planning for the Garden Tour is well underway with sponsors lined up. There will be Plein Air artists and musicians as well as a bike route and map this year. There is a new wireless printing system available from CW Mars. Patrons can upload documents to a website or use an app. The current print from home system does not prompt them to pay a fee, but the new system will. Currently staff have to open files, so there are privacy issues. \$2,000 would cover three years. The Friends voted to pay for one year as a trial and then for three years if it is successful. Ms. Moss gave an update on the parking meters, performance stage, Paco, toiletries drive, and a language learning program offered by the Massachusetts Library System. The Friends annual meeting will be live streamed on YouTube and will be available thereafter. Mr. Gaffney will give a talk on the history of Main Street. The Friends are welcoming a new board member in September, Suzy Campos, who worked at the Chicago public library. There have been requests for more sizes of the Coolidge T-Shirts.

Administrative Report

Ms. Downing reported that in-service training was provided to the staff this month on intellectual freedom and a second training on using the audio visual and accessibility equipment in the meeting rooms. Next month training will be offered on helping patrons find books and other library materials that they may enjoy. In May the library will close in the morning for an all staff meeting and training.

The head of technical services position has been posted and it is expected that interviews will be conducted in May.

There was a credit card testing attack on the website's donation form, with 150 failed attempts between March 1 and 10, and 40 fraudulent donations that got through and had to be refunded. With the help of Benjamin Kalish and working with Little Green Light and Stripe, captcha has been enabled on the donation form and the library will be requesting a refund of the fees paid for the fraudulent donations.

Ms. Bruce, Mary Biddle, and Ms. Downing attended Library Legislative Day this month. There were productive conversations with Representative Sabadosa and with an aide from Senator Comerford's office. It is hoped that everyone on the board will reach out and speak up for full funding of this year's library legislative agenda, "Ensuring Your Right to Read."

The Friends annual meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 12 at 6:30 PM following their business meeting at 5:30 PM. The program speaker is Dylan Gaffney who will be presenting an illustrated talk about the history of Main Street from 1887 to 1987.

Children's and Young Adult Librarian Sarah Johnson recently added a wooden boat to the picture book room.

The library received a lovely thank you note from a patron, Christine Dutton, this month expressing gratitude for all the library does.

Administrative Report (continued)

Library Giving Day is April 4, the first Tuesday in April, and it will look similar to what's been done in the past. Mr. Carrier wrote a guest column for the Gazette and hopes it will be published to coincide with Library Giving Day.

Covid Safety Update

Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss are happy to see that transmission in the local area is now considered low. As a result, signage has been removed recommending masking and instead it will be left to the individual's discretion. "Masks Welcome" is the new message and Forbes will continue to support patrons and staff who request others wear a mask when having an interaction. The Children's and Young Adult Department also decided to remove their acrylic barriers. Also, meeting room limits have been rescinded and will now allow up to full capacity based on fire code. Patrons or staff using meeting rooms can request lower capacity limits and masking for meetings and events.

In response to a question from Mr. Carrier, Ms. Downing said that the use of remote public meetings is currently set to expire at the end of March, but that a 2-year extension is in the works. Once this provision has passed, the trustees will review their by-laws to see if they need to be tweaked in response.

Ms. Prabhaker moved that the Administrative Report including the COVID Safety Update be accepted and placed on file. Ms. Bruce seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Next Meetings

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Wednesday, April 26 at 3:45 PM. Ms. Downing will invite the representatives from Bartholomew Inc. to attend, and will let the new treasurer Kyle Hamilton know. The trustees previously scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of 2022: Thursday, May 25; Thursday, June 22; Thursday, July 20; Thursday, September 21; Thursday, October 19; Thursday, November 16; and Thursday, December 21. Meetings will convene at 4 PM, unless the representatives of Bartholomew Inc. are invited, in which case the meeting will begin at 3:45 PM.

The next meeting of the Friends of Forbes Library will be held on Wednesday, April 12 at 5:30 PM followed by their annual meeting at 6:30 PM. Ms. Bruce will attend the business meeting on behalf of the trustees.

Communications

Ms. Downing received a letter dated March 15, 2023 from the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA). The letter provides context for requesting wage increases stating that over the last 15 years wages have stagnated especially compared to inflation and that many staff can not afford to live in the area they serve. It notes the vital services staff provided during the pandemic and continue to provide now, and that staff are stretched thin over the additional library's open hours. Relatively low salaries make it difficult to attract new candidates for open positions, and compensation has not kept pace as library staff are asked to take on additional roles.

Once the budget has been approved by the city, the negotiating committee consisting of Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Ms. Downing, and Ms. Moss will schedule a meeting with the FLEA representatives.

Discussion Topic: Meeting Room Use

Ms. Downing distributed information about the library's current meeting rooms and grounds use policy which states: *The Library encourages events that are open to the public free of charge. Meeting rooms are made available as a public service and booking a room in no way constitutes an endorsement of the program or philosophy of the group or the individuals using the facilities. The Trustees of Forbes Library affirm that facilities should be made available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliation of individuals or groups requesting their use, except in instances where groups support racist ideology or use hate speech.*

On the Forbes public events calendar, it says: *Forbes Library offers cultural and educational programs for all ages. Events are free unless otherwise noted. Many events at the library are organized by members of the community. The views expressed are not necessarily endorsed by the library.*

Recently Forbes hosted a high-profile community event called "Why Reparations? Why Northampton? Why Now?" and in the advertising for the event, it listed Forbes Library as a co-sponsor which was done in error instead of recognizing Forbes as the event host. At the event it was noted that Forbes Library makes meeting spaces, whether in person or virtual, available as a public service. This event was intended to provide background information and arguments for reparations in Northampton in advance of the issue being brought up at a city council meeting. The trustees discussed their concerns about this event and reiterated that while they helped technically and logistically, they did not endorse the content of the program.

Ms. Downing presented a second topic for discussion about hate speech and racist ideology exclusion. The current meeting room policy restricts use of library spaces for groups that "support racist ideology or use hate speech." This was added to the policy in 2021 during the last revision in alignment with Forbes' stance on Racial Justice. Hate speech is not excluded from protection under the first amendment and having this restriction in the meeting room use policy goes against ALA and other library organization recommendations because it puts the library at risk for lawsuits and because it goes against Forbes' commitment to upholding the tenants of freedom of speech. Ms. Downing distributed an excerpt from the ALA webpage titled "Hate Speech and Hate Crime." It states that under the First and Fourteenth Amendments, libraries cannot discriminate against a library user or deny the user access to resources and services based on their views and beliefs, including the use of meeting rooms. One strategy is for libraries to forgo completely the provision of public meeting rooms for all users. A second strategy is to employ the library's right under the First Amendment to speak in its own voice as a government agency about matters of importance. For example, Libraries could mount prominent signage throughout the building and in meeting rooms announcing its support for equality, diversity, and inclusion. Library sponsored programs can echo this message. The trustees discussed whether to remove the restriction on racist ideology and hate speech from the meeting room use policy. Ms. Wight suggested using alternate wording such as "defamation" or "inciting lawless action" and including a line that says Forbes does not condone hate speech and racist ideology while not outrightly restricting use of the meeting rooms. She asked whether the library's behavior policy might cover some of this. Ms. Downing said the behavior policy covers disruptive behavior, not speech. Ms. Prabhaker referenced how a similar situation was handled by the principal of JFK a few years ago. Ms. Moss said she wants to be sure that the library's policy is legally sound, and not onerous to enforce. Mr. Twarog expressed concern about

Discussion Topic: Meeting Room Use (continued)

the library's policy being challenged by outside groups. Mr. Carrier suggested that the policy be reviewed by the library's attorneys.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Committee Charter

Ms. Downing reported that she and Ms. Prabhaker are presenting a revised charter that is intended to make participation easier. The new charter allows participants to attend meetings that interest them or that they are available for without requiring that they commit to a term on the committee. It also explicitly states the intention to "center BIPOC voices both in participation and in meeting structure." Lastly, it changes the name from "advisory group" to "advisory committee" to bring it in alignment with the naming convention most often used by the library.

Ms. Prabhaker said that the original charge was very formal and bureaucratic, and didn't reflect what the group was trying to accomplish, which is to encourage people of different backgrounds without an already established connection to the library, to get involved. Mr. Carrier expressed strong concerns about a provision appearing in both the proposed new charges of the Racial & Social Justice Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Advisory Board. It states "...meetings are open to anyone who would like to join. Participation in the [committee] is fluid - Forbes Library recognizes that some participants may only attend a few meetings and that all present equally have the right to participate." He said that the trustees' bylaws call for committee members to be appointed by the trustees, and the bylaws would need to be updated before approving the new charges. Additionally, he said the trustees would be giving up one of their responsibilities in forgoing the ability to appoint members. He said there was potential for someone to claim to be a member of a committee and speak on behalf of the library without the trustees' approval. Ms. Prabhaker and Ms. Downing reiterated that the current system was not working for the committee and they were not finding it possible to achieve the goals of involving people of underrepresented communities and giving them a voice to set the agenda and tell the library what they need. Mr. Carrier said perhaps then it should not be an official committee. Ms. Wight suggested that the Chair and Co-Chair be appointed committee members, and would then be responsible for recruiting others to be guests at the meetings. Mr. Carrier suggested that the trustees think more about this and continue the discussion at a future meeting.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Charter

Ms. Downing and Ben Kalish developed a charter for this advisory committee, which has existed for a long time without a charter and without official recognition by the board. This charter gives the group that recognition and sets forth guidelines almost identical to those proposed in the Racial and Social Justice Advisory Committee charter. The trustees agreed table this discussion for the same reason as for the Racial & Social Advisory Committee and will discuss it further at a future meeting.

Increasing the Number of Trustees

Ms. Downing reported that the Lucentinis, the library's attorneys, have prepared a complaint to file in Probate Court to increase the number of trustees from five to seven. The trustees were asked to approve this change and to provide for their election in a manner consistent with Chapter 241 of the Acts of 1881, the statute incorporating the trustees. The complaint will be filed soon after it is approved today. Mr. Carrier reiterated that the city has been informed and is supportive. There is a lengthy approval process and it might not be fully in place in time for the September elections.

Increasing the Number of Trustees (continued)

Mr. Twarog moved to approve the complaint requesting to change the number of trustees from five to seven and to provide for their election in a manner consistent with Chapter 241 of the Acts of 1881. Ms. Bruce seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Charles Burleigh Painting Restoration

The trustees approved funding to clean and restore the painting of Charles Burleigh using Lyman Special Collections funds. Quotes totaling \$5,320 were approved, which will clean and stabilize this large oil painting and the ornate frame. Lyman has spent all of its budgeted funds this year and Ms. Downing would like the board to consider using Morin for this work so that it will not be necessary to touch the principal in the Lyman fund.

Ms. Bruce moved to approve spending \$5,320 from the Morin Fund for restoration of the Charles Burleigh painting. Mr. Twarog seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Coolidge Funds

Ms. Downing recommended that Forbes withdraw a total of \$4,000 in FY24 for support of Coolidge programming based on a 4% yield representing \$1,000 from the Chester Fund and \$3,000 from the Pike Fund. The Coolidge Committee will make a recommendation on how it should be spent and submit it to the trustees for approval.

Ms. Bruce moved to approve withdrawing \$4,000 from the endowment for Coolidge standing committee activities in FY24. Mr. Twarog seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Bathroom Ventilation CPA Request

Ms. Downing reported that preliminary approval has been received for \$66,500 to fix the ventilation issues in the bathrooms. The project needs approval by the city solicitor and then it will move forward to a vote at the next CPA meeting. The hope is to go out to bid for a contractor for this work and the accessibility improvements that have already been approved with CDBG funds. The trustees thanked Ms. Bruce for her help in getting the approval.

Geothermal Feasibility Study

Ms. Downing reported that Carolyn Misch from the planning department has let her know that they are looking at a geothermal heating and cooling system that would serve Forbes Library and the future home of the Resilience Hub on the corner. The first step will be hiring a consultant to do a feasibility study. Ms. Downing said that insulation work in the attic will take place in May or June, which will hopefully help with energy costs.

Statistics

Ms. Moss distributed statistics from the last 3 months. Both circulation and door count are up slightly over last year. She thanked Heather Diaz for creating the beautiful graphics for the report.

Reports on Subcommittee and Other Meetings

Strategic Planning Committee - Ms. Wight reported that the leadership team is finishing a draft of the action plan while the strategic planning committee is working on writing a draft of the rest of the plan. Seth Gregory is

Reports on Subcommittee and Other Meetings (continued)

presenting a preview of the strategic branding with slight updates from what the board saw last month to the staff and later on to a group of community leaders. The Friends and Coolidge committee have also reviewed the branding and Mr. Gregory is working on revisions based on their feedback. It is hoped to have a draft action plan to show the board next month.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Ms. Wight reported that live streaming of events are now happening in the museum. The nominating committee will meet soon. Bill Scher will become chair and they will brainstorm more effective ways of attracting new members to the larger committee. The presidential book club continues to maintain a high level of participation and they have begun to talk about what comes next. Plans continue for the summer public panel and musical centennial events. This year's goals will be discussed and approved at the April meeting and will become a regular agenda item at future January meetings. The committee began discussing next year's budget pending the amount approved by the board of trustees. Mr. Carrier said that what the committee needs is someone who really wants to get involved and make this their project, to bring the museum up to its potential, a museum not only about Coolidge the man, but about important historical events and movements of his time as president.

Other Business

Ms. Wight reported that the city council is conducting a Zoom meeting on Sunday, March 26 at noon seeking input about barriers to serving on city boards and commissions.

Ms. Bruce brought up the budget and timeline for the performance stage and the trustees said they are anticipating a budget of \$180,000-\$200,000. So far grant funding has been awarded for \$130,000 with the library needing to raise an additional \$50,000 or more to match the Mass Development grant of \$50,000. Construction is unlikely to happen until Summer 2024.

At 5:35 PM Ms. Bruce moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Wight seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Prabhaker, Mr. Twarog, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:35 PM.