

**TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY**  
**Thursday, May 23, 2024**

**Present:** Ms. Rebekah Anderson, Ms. Debin Bruce, Mr. Russell Carrier, Ms. Lisa Downing, Ms. Ruth Francis, Ms. Molly Moss, Ms. Shelly Ruocco, Ms. Elizabeth Sheirer, Ms. Anne Teschner. **Also Present:** Jason Petcen, observer for the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA). **Present via Zoom:** Ms. Katy Wight; Serena Smith, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library; Kyle Hamilton, Treasurer. **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 May 23, 2024.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**Secretary's Report**

Ms. Bruce moved that the Secretary's report of April 25, 2024 be accepted and placed on file with a few corrections. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Treasurer's Report**

Ms. Hamilton presented the Treasurer's Report for the month ending April 30, 2024. The Aid Fund has a balance of \$100,482.10. The Book & Media Fund has a balance of \$14,234.42. The total in all the cash accounts at Florence Bank is \$342,533.20. The value of the endowment on April 30, 2024 was \$6,516,484.06. The report include local fund activity for the month of April. The total cash balance in the operating account, savings account, and CDs was \$270,760.50. The value of the endowment on March 31 was \$6,758,672.54.

Ms. Hamilton said the auditing services will appear on next month's report. There are 4 more pay periods this fiscal year, with an almost 2 week accrual period that will be paid on July 4. This will greatly reduce the balance in the Aid Fund. Ms. Hamilton is in contact with Ms. Moss about technology expenses to be allocated to the Book & Media fund. She will also be in touch with questions about the Athena Garden Fund donations. The trustees then discussed what to do with the 7-month CD at Florence Bank due to mature on May 29. Ms. Francis suggested considering transferring the balance to a money market fund at Bartholomew Inc. to earn a slightly higher rate of interest and to keep the funds flexible and available. After discussion the trustees agreed that it made sense for now to roll it over to another 7-month CD and reconsider it after the Finance Committee has had more time to consider options and a new treasurer is in place. Ms. Hamilton said that no action is required and the CD will roll over automatically unless the trustees request otherwise.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to roll over the 7-month CD at Florence Bank. Ms. Teschner seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson,

**Treasurer's Report** (continued)

Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

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

Ms. Downing submitted a list of undesignated and designated gifts received from multiple donors in April with \$33,329.28 going to the Performance Stage Fund; \$22,000 to the Athena Garden Fund; \$136 to the Marie Hershkowitz Memorial Children's Book Endowment Fund; and \$30 to the Programming Fund: Adult. There were no receipts from sales/rents in April.

Ms. Downing said the donations were largely the result of Library Giving Day and she distributed a list of donors and their comments. A copy of a letter written by Mr. Carrier to donors he had reached out to was also distributed to the trustees. Ms. Downing said that there are still funds left in the Athena Garden Fund to cover costs for the planned reception.

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

The following donations were approved by the trustees at the April meeting: Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, welded metal sculpture by Brian McQuillan donated by Eileen Travis given in memory of Thomas Ruane; and *Wahconah Falls*, a drawing by Dana Salisbury from her installation Waconah Reconstruction.

**Financial Report**

Ms. Downing reported that many city departments and both Forbes and Lilly libraries have been asked by the Mayor's office to attend a public hearing about the FY25 budget on Thursday, May 30 at 6 PM in case there are questions about the budgets from city councilors. This hybrid meeting is on zoom and in the Council Chambers and will begin with public comment. Ms. Downing distributed a message from Mayor Sciarra about the FY25 budget: "The Culture and Recreation departments actively enrich our community, through our public libraries, Parks and Recreation, and the Arts and Culture Department. Forbes Library and Lilly Library both saw increased attendance and circulation, continuing to serve as pivotal educational and community resources. Meanwhile, Parks and Recreation expanded its programming despite weather challenges, and the Arts and Culture Department effectively distributed significant funds to local artists and enhanced cultural events. These departments collectively demonstrate a 2.9% budget increase to sustain and grow their vital community services."

Ms. Downing asked if the trustees would like to prepare a public statement and who would speak on their behalf. Ms. Wight said that she would be happy to speak for the trustees at the meeting. Both Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss are planning to attend.

Mr. Carrier then discussed the city council's current role in the city's budget process, and a resolution they are considering to change the process, giving the council more say in moving funds from one department to another. This would have big implications for the budgeting process in the future.

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**Department Report**

There was no department report this month.

**Friends of Forbes**

Ms. Teschner attended the May 1 meeting of the Friends of Forbes and reported that it was a great orientation for her and gave her the opportunity to meet the Friends. They discussed their finances and garden tour plans. Mr. Carrier asked that trustees submit a brief written report of the significant things discussed by the Friends such as their financial balances, events they are sponsoring, votes on funding requests from Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss, and changes in membership. The report will be distributed to the trustees in the packet prior to their monthly meeting. Mr. Carrier spoke to JoEllen MacKenzie who told him that the Friends had received another \$5,000 from Florence Bank, which will go toward the performance stage.

**Administrative Report**

Ms. Downing reported that the Friends garden tour is coming up on June 8. New this year, the Friends gave gorgeous full color t-shirts with artwork designed by Rosemary Barrett. Tickets for the tour, raffles, and the t-shirts are now available for purchase at the library.

The Athena garden bed has been installed and it looks gorgeous. Every day when Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss walk by they notice patrons admiring the statue. They would like to thank everyone who helped with the planting including Ms. Teschner and several members of the Friends board. The ribbon cutting ceremony will take place on Saturday, June 15 at 11 AM. Eileen Travis who donated financially as well as her expertise as a landscape architect will be there along with the sculptor, Brian McQuillan. The trustees were encouraged to attend.

The library's telephones were upgraded by the IT department this month. This was a long planned citywide upgrade to make the phones compliant with the E-911 standard that provides GPS location tracking in the event of an emergency.

Forbes' Valley Bike ebike station will soon be operational again. The city signed a contract with Drop Mobility, and bikes will be rolling out starting at the end of May.

Forbes has a new staff photo directory for internal use. This will help when new staff and trustees are trying to become familiar with employees. This directory is available internally only, and will not be shared publicly.

There was a very successful half day staff meeting earlier this month. It included an introduction to zines by members of the Zine Club, an introduction to newly defined core competencies for staff, and an overview of Community Legal Aid which provides free legal services to income eligible community members as well as anyone over 60. A new staff photo was taken that will be posted on the website.

Ms. Moss and Sarah Johnson met with the school superintendent and members of the school staff to plan a district wide K-8 Literacy Challenge. This will be launched in the fall, with students encouraged to get a head start on the challenge with Summer Reading.

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**Administrative Report** (continued)

The Children's and Young Adult Services department was selected as one of 80 "K-2nd grade Children's Book Council Favorites Awards" judges. Staff will receive children's books to review and then Forbes will be able to keep the books.

Forbes has recently held two library programs with author Ilyon Woo who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Biography; last winter with Self-Evident Media and this spring as part of All Hamptons Read with Historic Northampton.

Ms. Bruce moved that the Administrative Report be accepted and placed on file. Ms. Francis seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Next Meetings**

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Thursday, June 20 at 4:00 PM. The trustees previously scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of 2024: Thursday, July 25; Thursday, September 19; Thursday, October 24; Thursday, November 21; and Thursday, December 19. Meetings will convene at 4:00 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, June 5, 2024 at 6:30 PM. Ms. Anderson will attend on behalf of the trustees.

**Communications**

There were no communications received this month.

**Discussion Topic: Being a Forbes Trustee**

Ms. Downing said that with a new 7-member board, and 4 new trustees who have come on this year, now is a good time for discussion about what it means to be a trustee. She invited those that have been serving to respond to the following questions followed by an open discussion.

The first question was "Why did you decide to become a trustee?" Ms. Wight said she grew up in libraries and now works in publishing. She talks to librarians every day and has an MLIS degree. She heard about an opening on the board in 2015 and decided to run because she cares about libraries. Ms. Francis said she ran because she was looking for a way to give back to the community in a way that uses her skills. Ms. Teschner said the basic idea was to give back to the community by enhancing the library and using her skills from running an literacy organization for 25 years.

Ms. Bruce said she had been on the board of the Survival Center for 8 years, and was looking for another organization to apply her skills towards. She said it is a pleasure working with such a well-run institution. Ms. Ruocco said that she is a heavy user of Forbes Library, and has been a library user her whole life. She was looking for something important to do, and saw an email advertising the trustee openings that mentioned a need for human resource skills which is her area of expertise. Mr. Carrier said he grew up in Northampton in a home with little education or books. Lilly Library became very important to him, and later Forbes, as he progressed through higher education to become a public school teacher. Out of concerns about funding for the library, he helped to start the Friends of Forbes, and then later ran for trustee when there was an opening. Ms. Anderson grew up in libraries,

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**Discussion Topic: Being a Forbes Trustee** (continued)

went to library school, and served on a library board in Minnesota. She moved to this area 2 years ago and met Ms. Bruce who suggested she run for trustee. The timing now was right and she wants to learn more about the community she is now a part of while also giving back.

The second discussion question was "What is your favorite thing about being a trustee?" Ms. Wight said it was marching with Forbes Library in the Northampton Pride Parade and hearing the appreciation from the crowd, which makes her happy every time. Ms. Bruce said she probably knew the least about libraries of any trustee when elected, and has greatly enjoyed learning about libraries. Ms. Francis said that she really appreciates how many people come up to her and thank her for serving as a trustee. Mr. Carrier said he really enjoys coming into the building and seeing people using the library as envisioned during the renovation. He also appreciates the thanks and feedback he gets from people in the community. Ms. Teschner said that she finds Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss to be very compelling and enjoys working with them.

The third discussion question was "What do you wish you knew sooner?" Ms. Bruce said learning everyone's name. Ms. Wight said the biggest surprise for her was how many details and sources go into the funding of the library. Mr. Carrier said that it takes a lot longer and costs a lot more to do things than you think it will. Ms. Downing said that she and Ms. Moss have an open door policy and that the trustees should always feel free to reach out and ask questions.

**Committee Appointments**

Ms. Downing said she appreciates everyone promptly submitting committee assignment preferences. She distributed a list of recommended appointments for the President's approval: Building and Grounds - Ms. Bruce (chair), Ms. Wight, Ms. Anderson; Coolidge Standing Committee - Ms. Wight, Mr. Carrier; Development - Ms. Bruce, Ms. Anderson, Ms. Francis; Finance - Ms. Teschner, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis (chair); Personnel - Ms. Wight, Mr. Carrier (chair), Ms. Ruocco; Racial and Social Justice - Ms. Teschner, Ms. Ruocco. Guidelines for committee chairs were distributed to the trustees. Each committee has an email address that will go to the members of that committee. Ms. Moss will send an email after this meeting with those addresses.

Ms. Downing said that all committee meetings are open public meetings and are posted with the city clerk's office at least 48 hours prior to the meeting time. Mr. Carrier said that while the Attorney General ruled that Forbes is not governed by the open meeting laws, the trustees agreed in their bylaws to abide by them. There can be no more than 3 trustees at any committee meeting, otherwise it becomes a full board meeting. The trustees are allowed to meet socially as long as no library business is discussed. Likewise, trustees cannot email more than 2 other trustees without triggering open meeting laws. An exception for this is communication around scheduling. Mr. Carrier said the first order of business for committees is to select a chair, if they haven't done so already, who will preside over the meetings and work with Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss to come up with an agenda. Minutes do not need to be as comprehensive as for the regular board meetings, and the chair comes up with a short summary of the business transacted to distribute prior to the full monthly board meetings. Ms. Downing will add any action items to the trustees' monthly agenda.

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**Committee Appointments** (continued)

Mr. Carrier made the appointments as proposed.

**Art Selection Committee**

Ms. Downing reported that during the discussion of committees at last month's meeting, a suggestion was made to form a committee to review and make recommendations on art selected for the library's permanent collection. Faith Kaufmann and Ms. Downing have developed the following recommendation for the board's approval:

The Art Selection Committee is an ad hoc committee that comes together to consider significant donations or purchases (valued at over \$1,000) for the library's permanent art collection. Artwork for consideration can be brought to our attention by a variety of means including a suggestion by a trustee, staff member, or the community at large, as well as by a potential artwork donor.

The committee consists of up to three board members along with the Library Director, Assistant Director, and Head of Arts and Music.

This committee will:

- Follow the guidelines of the Special Collections Policy
- Review artwork for consideration
- Make recommendations about acquisitions to the full board
- Communicate with relevant parties about decisions

Mr. Carrier said the library has an art collection, in addition to the Coolidge Collection and the Local History Collection. The focus of the collection is on local artists or local topics, and also includes objects such as older clocks and oriental rugs. There isn't an adequate funding source to maintain the collection, and the trustees look for donors when restoration work is needed. The collection is owned and insured by Forbes, not the city. Mr. Carrier suggested the new trustees read the agreement between Forbes and the city which outlines the hybrid and complex relationship.

Ms. Teschner made a motion to approve the formation of an ad hoc Art Selection committee to become active when needed as proposed by Ms. Downing and Ms. Kaufmann. Ms. Bruce seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Treasurer Selection**

Ms. Downing reported that the Finance Committee met to discuss filling the treasurer's position when Ms. Hamilton leaves at the end of June. They recommend splitting the administrative and bookkeeping responsibilities from the higher level accounting duties. They are seeking a solution that will afford the most stability and efficiency possible moving forward. The Finance Committee seeks approval to move forward with the search because there is such limited time to find a replacement.

Ms. Francis made a motion to give the Finance Committee the ability to come up with a solution to replacing the Treasurer, all the way up to hiring a new Treasurer and/or others, and that the Finance Committee will keep the trustees informed of their progress. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which

**Treasurer Selection** (continued)

was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Ms. Hamilton left the meeting at 5:40 PM.

**Bathroom Ventilation and Accessibility Project**

Ms. Downing gave background on the bathroom ventilation project which has been in the works for many years. The purpose is to improve the ventilation in the public restrooms which is currently non-existent, creating unpleasant odors and safety concerns especially during the pandemic, and also to improve accessibility by removing the lip in the doorway and replacing the heavy doors with ones that are easier to open, especially for people in wheelchairs. Funding sources include federal grants administered by the city as well as \$170,000 in capital improvement funds to be spent in FY25. The bids were opened yesterday and the only bid, which was from Keiter, came in at \$58,000 over the available funds. The Friends have already pledged \$6,000 and there is a donor willing to provide another \$6,000, bringing the gap down to \$46,000. Ms. Downing said that state aid this year was almost \$18,000 more than expected, and that could be applied towards the gap, along with another \$6,000 from the Friends and \$2,000 from the Morin Fund, further reducing the gap to \$20,000. She suggested having a conversation with the city, telling them what Forbes has done to fundraise and meet the shortfall, and asking them to contribute the remaining \$20,000.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to apply the \$17,747 surplus in state aid, \$2,000 from the Morin Fund, and an additional \$6,000 from the Friends towards the funding gap for the bathroom ventilation and accessibility project, then asking the city to help fill the remaining \$20,000 gap. Ms. Teschner seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

**Trustees Award**

Ms. Downing reported that this year's trustees award ceremony is on Thursday, June 13 at 6:30 PM in the Coolidge Museum. The trustees will be honoring Stan Sherer and Joe Twarog. Mr. Sherer will be showing a montage of clips from his local history documentary. To honor Mr. Twarog's deep commitment to intellectual freedom, there will be a reading of short passages from banned books. The trustees were invited to participate in these readings. They can read from a favorite book that has been challenged or a selection can be provided to them.

**Performance Stage Update**

Ms. Bruce said that the RFP has been drafted and now needs to go to the city for their input, after which it will be sent to the city's list of approved contractors. The stage itself will be prefab, and will take 3-4 months to complete offsite, during which time the landscaping work will be done onsite. Mr. Carrier said that even though all the necessary funding is not yet in place, there is a donor willing to make up the difference, and that the project needs to be kept under \$300,000 to avoid additional legal requirements. Aside from the construction, there will be additional expenses for a sound system.

**Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings**

Personnel Committee - Mr. Carrier reported that the Personnel Committee met on May 9. The committee carefully reviewed the standing committee requests of each trustee. After a thorough discussion of the library's needs, the trustee requests, as well as seniority, the committee recommended the president appoint the new members of the standing committees for a period extending through the end of 2025. The committee tried to honor the top requests of each trustee.

Finance Committee - Ms. Francis reported that the Finance Committee met for the first time last week and elected Ms. Francis to chair the committee. Jennie Lamour, the administrative assistant, sat in on the conversation. They reviewed the existing treasurer's job description and developed a plan for moving forward that will involve splitting duties.

The Coolidge Standing Committee - Ms. Wight reported that the Coolidge Museum is having a swing band concert on June 1 at 2 PM that should be lots of fun. The committee is talking about their FY2025 budget which will be significantly larger thanks to the Peter Rowe Coolidge endowment fund.

**Other Business**

There was no other business.

At 5:51 PM Ms. Teschner moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously with Ms. Anderson, Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:51 PM.