

**TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY**  
**Thursday, February 20, 2025**

**Present:** Ms. Debin Bruce, Ms. Lisa Downing, Ms. Molly Moss, Ms. Shelly Ruocco, Ms. Elizabeth Sheirer, Ms. Katy Wight. **Also Present:** Martha McCormick, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library. **Present via Zoom:** Mr. Russ Carrier; Ms. Ruth Francis; Ms. Anne Teschner; Mr. Doug Wheat; Ms. Jo Landers. **Absent:** Ms. Rebekah Anderson.

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 4:03 PM.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**Secretary's Report**

Ms. Bruce moved that the Secretary's report of January 23, 2025 be accepted and placed on file with a few minor corrections. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

The updated annual list of trustee contact information was distributed.

**Bills & Warrants**

The trustees signed the warrant dated February 20, 2025.

**Bookkeeper's Report**

Ms. Landers presented the January 31 Trustees Financial Reports which included a Profit and Loss Comparison, Balance Sheet Comparison, and Stage Fund income and expense report, as well as a report on the endowment funds from Bartholomew Inc. Ms. Landers asked the trustees for feedback on the level of detail in the reports. She said that in the future she can include a separate report on the Coolidge museum renovation income and expenses. The value of the endowment on January 31, 2025 was \$7,034,242.01

In response to a question from Ms. Teschner, Ms. Landers said that the stage fund income and expenses are included in the figures on the main report. She also said that capital expenses of more than \$2,500 are on the Profit & Loss reports so that they are more visible, but at the end of the fiscal year will be moved to the Balance Sheet, where they will appear as assets rather than expenses. Mr. Wheat said he agreed with this approach. He asked if Ms. Landers prepares a Cash Flow statement, and Ms. Landers said that she will add it to the report. She said the big number to focus on is the net operating income. The Finance Committee will review the reports at their next meeting. Ms. Teschner said she applauds Ms. Landers, library staff, and Ms. Francis and the Finance Committee for the hard work they have done in transitioning to the new system of bookkeeping and reporting.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to approve the January Bookkeeper's Report and place it on file. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

**Preliminary FY26 City Budget**

Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss distributed the first draft of a proposed budget for FY26. Ms. Downing said that the mayor requested a level-services budget with a 2.5% increase over last year, roughly a \$39,000 increase. This budget is

**Preliminary FY26 City Budget** (continued)

quite tight, and is only possible because of a recent retirement. It also incorporates a \$20,000 line item for the bookkeeper that wasn't previously in the budget. There are some savings over last year in the electricity line item which will go down even further after paying off the LED light conversion. Other areas may be under-budgeted including the water and sewer line item. Ms. Downing will submit this proposed budget to the city tomorrow. It reflects just the city appropriation portion of the library's budget and is the beginning of a conversation with the mayor and city council. Ms. Downing will also submit a narrative along with the budget saying that the projected 2.5% increases over the next few years are not sustainable for a level-services budget. Typically, the trustees' President and Vice President attend the budget meeting with the mayor and city finance director. A full budget including all sources of income and expenses will be brought back to the trustees for final approval at a later date.

Ms. Wight said that the mayor has asked if any of Forbes' state money or expenses come from federal sources. Ms. Moss said that the library relies upon funding from the federal government through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) which goes to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), to help support the statewide library system. These funds help support delivery services, access to electronic databases, CWMARS, and Overdrive including e-books and e-audio.

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

Ms. Downing reported that \$8,118.68 in undesignated gifts were received in January. The following designated gift was also received: \$280 to the Coolidge Fund. There were no donations or receipts from sales/rents in January.

Ms. Moss said that a large donation is expected again this year that will bring the total of this year's annual fund in line with last year's. Additionally, there are 2 upcoming fundraising events, one for the Coolidge museum renovation on March 4 and Library Giving Day on April 1.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to accept the gifts and donations as reported by Ms. Downing. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

**Next Meetings**

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Tuesday, March 25 at 4 PM. Ms. Wight will attend remotely. The trustees scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of 2025: Thursday, April 24; Tuesday, May 20; Wednesday, June 18; Thursday, July 24; Thursday, September 25; Thursday, October 23; Thursday, November 20; and Thursday, December 18. Meetings will convene at 4:00 PM unless otherwise noted.

Ms. Downing said that the governor's order for remote meetings expires on March 31, but there's been some discussion about revising or extending it. There hasn't been a resolution yet, and it is unlikely for one to pass before the end of March, so there will likely be a stopgap measure. In addition, the trustees are in the process of changing their bylaws to allow remote participation by the trustees.

The next meeting of the Friends of Forbes Library will be held on Wednesday, March 5, 2024 at 6:30 PM. Ms. Wight will attend on behalf of the trustees.

### **Trustees Award**

Ms. Downing thanked those who reached out after the last meeting with suggestions for recipients of the annual Trustees Award. She said that past practice has been to honor people after they've completed their service to the library. However, after last month's meeting, JoEllen Mackenzie reached out to suggest Rich Szlosek for this year's Trustees Award. He has been volunteering with the Coolidge Museum on the Standing Committee, writing articles about Coolidge, and in the last few years as a faithful museum guide. He is passionate about making sure that Coolidge's legacy lives on in his adopted hometown and has been very helpful in getting Forbes this far with the exhibit redesign project as well as the documentary film that he helped write. Ms. Downing said she enthusiastically brings his name forward for consideration.

Ms. Teschner made a motion to award the Trustees Award this year to Rich Szlosek. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

Ms. Downing will let him know and see if he is willing to accept the award. She said that the Friends have invited him to be the speaker at their annual meeting on Wednesday April 2 at 6:30 PM. If he accepts, the award ceremony can be combined with that event.

### **Solar Purchase Agreement**

Ms. Downing said that the new performance stage will have a roof capable of having solar panels. Ms. Bruce connected with a local solar company who has worked with dozens of local nonprofits as well as two Northampton elementary schools. Ms. Downing is seeking an agreement to install solar panels on the performance stage and to authorize herself to sign the purchase power agreement. The proposal calls for Forbes to enter into an agreement to allow Phippenadams Solar to install a 5.06kW solar array on the performance stage roof. The installation will come with no cost to Forbes. On behalf of Forbes, Ms. Downing will sign a purchase of power agreement with Phippenadams Solar to annually, for six years, buy the electricity produced by the solar array at a price discounted from market value. During that time, Phippenadams Solar will receive the solar renewable energy credits (SRECs). At the end of six years, Phippenadams Solar will sell the solar array to Forbes for \$1 and Forbes will pick up the SREC credits. In response to a question from Ms. Teschner, Ms. Bruce said the solar array will have no impact on the sound system. In response to a question from Ms. Francis, Ms. Bruce said that she will find out where the solar panels are being produced and let her know.

Ms. Bruce made a motion to authorize Forbes to enter into an agreement with Phippenadams Solar to install a solar array above the performance stage and to authorize Ms. Downing to sign a purchase of power agreement with details as outlined above. Ms. Wight seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Ms. Bruce, Mr. Carrier, Ms. Francis, Ms. Ruocco, Ms. Teschner, and Ms. Wight all voting in favor.

### **Department Report**

There was no department report this month.

### **Administrative Report**

Ms. Downing said that a lot of staff have been out sick and everyone has been a bit stressed, but have been doing a fantastic job.

**Administrative Report** (continued)

She said that Forbes supported the work of the Reparations Committee late last month when Dylan Gaffney spoke to the local television program Mass Appeal about the research that was done using resources in the Hampshire Room to uncover the lives of people who were enslaved in Northampton. The segment can be viewed online. Additionally, next week Forbes will be hosting lunch on Thursday, February 27 for a program called, Freedom Dreaming: Resistance, Resilience, and Repair in the Age of Trump with Dr. Ousmane Power-Greene, scholar, author, and chair of the Northampton Reparations Study Commission. There will be a discussion of the history of slavery and Jim Crow in Northampton based on his work with the Documenting Black Lives in the Valley Project, the contemporary reparations movement, and the recent discovery of how slavery and slave-derived finance capital funded key institutions in Northampton. Ms. Teschner made the connection with Dr. Power-Greene to make this event happen and has involved the Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group. Ms. Downing asked the trustees to please join if they are able.

Several committees are discussing their goals for the year. It is anticipated that those will be compiled for review within the next month or two.

The Winter Exquisite zine and diorama fest held this month in the reading room was a huge success. Steven Stover along with the rest of the Forbes Zine Club should be very proud of the event they created. It brought lots of new people into the library and in the words of one attendee, "Thank you for having this exquisite winter fest. It is a splendid departure from the current season of despair & turmoil."

Forbes has signed the contract with MGT and it is anticipated that the compensation and classification study will begin within the month.

The wonderful Friends of Forbes surprised the staff once again with a staff table full of Valentine's Day treats and decorations. This has become a beloved annual tradition for everyone on staff.

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

**Discussion Topic**

There was no discussion topic this month.

**Communications**

There were no communications this month.

**Building Updates**

Ms. Downing reported that the remaining issues for the bathroom renovation project are still being finalized. A solution for the doors seems to have been found at a cost of \$12,000 for the 4 doors that involves retrofitting them with hardware in addition to the push button controls. The city has said that it does not have the money and has asked Forbes to contribute towards that cost. The library's labor and repairs line item is \$10,000 which has already been met. Ms. Downing plans to have a follow-up conversation with the city closer to the end of the fiscal year when she'll have a better idea if there is any surplus. In the meantime, the doors are sort of functioning, and the staff have become adept at fixing them quickly when necessary. Ms. Downing said that fixing the ventilation issue has been delayed due to the weather.

**Building Updates** (continued)

Ms. Downing said that the performance stage walkthrough happened last week and the response was strong. The bid opening is on February 27, and then she'll know how many bids were received and for how much.

A meeting has been convened with Dietz Architects who are finalizing and combining the bidding documents for both the HVAC and renovation work for the children's department. It is hoped that the number of alternates will be reduced by combining the two projects. Ms. Downing said that both the Friends and the Development Committee were receptive when she approached them about the need for additional funds for the project.

**Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings**

Friends of Forbes - Ms. Francis attended the February 5th Friends meeting. Mr. Monroe presented the proposed budget for 2025, which includes an increase to adult programming as well as staff development and community engagement. The budget was approved as presented. Ms. Downing shared that the library just received the okay from the city to go ahead and put the children's and teen room out to bid. However, there is a \$100,000 gap. Ms. MacKenzie mentioned that about \$5,000 had been tabled for the project a while ago. The Artisan Fair is scheduled for Sunday, October 5. There was discussion regarding landscapers and bags from an auto body shop. They discussed a raffle for Lego flowers for Valentines Day and are doing a push on social media. There was discussion around the slate of officers. Ms. MacKenzie is happy to pass the baton or stay on as chair or co-chair. Ms. McCormick said she is stepping down as vice chair, so that someone else can step up to prepare to be chair when Ms. MacKenzie steps down.

Building and Grounds - Ms. Bruce said that the committee has compiled a long list of projects in a spreadsheet that they will discuss at their next meeting. She said that she thanks the staff for keeping the building up and running during this cold and messy weather.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Ms. Wight reported that the Coolidge Standing Committee met on January 7. The main agenda item for discussion was the choice of museum exhibit designers to reimagine a new Coolidge Museum. JoEllen MacKenzie, Co-Chair of the Exhibits Committee presented the update of the process and recommendations from the exhibits committee. The Exhibits Committee received and reviewed 7 proposals and chose 4 firms to meet with over Zoom during December. The committee narrowed the pool down from 4 to 3 finalists and recommended Design Division. The Standing Committee voted unanimously in favor and to forward this to the January Trustees meeting. The Development Committee assisted Julie Bartlett-Nelson and Ms. Downing in submitting a grant application to the Massachusetts Cultural Council Facilities Fund which could give \$15,000 towards design fees. There are also plans to apply to CPA soon to hire a conservation firm to evaluate and make a conservation, display, and storage plan for textiles and accessories in the Coolidge and Local History collections. There will be a fundraiser for the project on March 4. They are still looking for new committee members and volunteers and will have a table at the upcoming volunteer event. Ms. Downing said that a couple of grant proposals were submitted and she is meeting with potential people to fill a fundraising consultant role. Ms. Wight said that the book club is going strong, and they've received a recurring donation from a book club member.

Development Committee - Ms. Anderson submitted a report stating that they met on February 13 and discussed the fall appeal. January donations came in a bit

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

low, with one generous gift still expected. Overall donations are on track. Gifts have slowed down for the Coolidge appeal. The library received approval from the City to go out to bid in March for a \$1.4 million project to include the Children's (Youth Programming and Teen Renovation spaces) and HVAC. The work is to begin in April or May. The budget does not include furniture or technology. It is hoped that additional funds will be raised on Library Giving Day, which will build on successful designs and approaches from previous years including matching gifts. A Coolidge Centennial Giving Day will try to raise funds for the Coolidge Museum and Library renovation. A donor and volunteer event will be offered on March 2, and the trustees were encouraged to attend this day of fun and gratitude.

Finance Committee - Ms. Francis reported that the Finance Committee met on February 12 and recognized that as a new committee, they need to create goals for this calendar year. Their goals include getting the library's financial books in order, cleaning up old audits, and addressing other lingering items. The draft budget was reviewed; it is tight but covers most of the critical expenses. The FY23 audit is near completion, and they anticipate moving onto the FY24 audit after tax season. Additionally, they began discussions on how to best engage with Bartholomew Inc.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Ms. Teschner reported that their next meeting is March 3 at 4 PM. They will be looking at their charge and purpose, which currently seems a bit hazy, and bring it back to the full board for review. She encouraged the trustees to attend the lunch and talk on February 27 called, Freedom Dreaming: Resistance, Resilience, and Repair in the Age of Trump with Dr. Ousmane Power-Greene, chair of the Northampton Reparations Study Commission. She said it will be a profound and interesting talk. Ms. Wight thanked her for coordinating it.

Personnel Committee - Ms. Ruocco reported that the Personnel Committee met on January 27. They began by discussing the upcoming compensation study. Ms. Downing signed the MGT contract, and it is expected that the project will be completed in May or June. Next, they discussed the needed updates to the By-Laws with the plan to complete these edits by the next trustees' meeting. Changes include updating the Treasurer job description and required attendance at trustees' meetings, review of remote participation wording, and changing the titles for President and Vice-President to Chair or Chairperson and Vice-Chair or Vice-Chairperson. The trustees reviewed the proposed changes and agreed that the Finance Committee should review the wording about the Treasurer. It will be hard to finalize the wording about remote attendance until the Governor updates the statewide policy. There are several sections that pre-date the pandemic and need to be tweaked. The trustees agreed that if necessary and with enough notice, participants can request assistance with equipment for remote participation. If the identity of remote participants is not obvious, they will be asked to introduce themselves for purposes of the meeting record. The provision that attendees must be visible at all times will be removed. Since action item votes are now taken by roll call vote, this section can be removed. A new provision is proposed that exceptions to in-person participation may vary from the items listed due to the state's remote participation provision. Section 8 about subcommittees stating that only Coolidge Advisory Committee members can vote will also be removed. The Personnel Committee will also prepare a trustee survey to go after this meeting and be due back before their next meeting on March 18. After the results are tabulated, they will be discussed at a future trustees

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

meeting. The goal is to find out what trustees see as working well or needing improvement and how best the trustees think they can contribute to the work of the library. None of the questions will be required. Ms. Teschner said she doesn't feel she's been on the board long enough to be able to answer the questions. Ms. Ruocco said it is intended to provide a pathway for feedback from the trustees about their experiences being on the board thus far, and will provide a bouncing off point for a future discussion. Ms. Moss said it shouldn't take more than 10 minutes to complete the survey, and that board reflection is recommended by the MBLC. The Committee is also in agreement to use the same form and process for the Library Director's biannual evaluation as used 2 years ago. Ms. Moss will send out the form for the trustees to fill out. The results will be compiled in a spreadsheet and shared with the Personnel Committee, who will summarize them and present them at an upcoming trustees' meeting.

**Other Business**

There was no other business.

At 5:31 PM Ms. Bruce moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:31 PM.