

**TRUSTEES OF FORBES LIBRARY**  
**Thursday, February 26, 2026**

**Present:** Lisa Downing, Ruth Francis, Fred Kass, Molly Moss, Shelly Ruocco, Elizabeth Sheirer, Katy Wight. **Also Present:** Dylan Gaffney, Local History & Special Collections; Jacquie Fraser, observer for the Friends of Forbes Library. **Present via Zoom:** Lolana Sevilla, trustee; Anne Teschner, trustee; Heather Diaz, observer for the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA); Jo Landers, Bookkeeper; Melissa Maciborski. **Absent:** Rebekah Anderson, Doug Wheat.

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 4:00 PM.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**Secretary's Report**

Shelly Ruocco moved that the Secretary's report of January 22, 2026 be accepted and placed on file. Fred Kass seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

The updated contact list for 2026 was distributed to the trustees.

**Financial Reports**

Jo Landers prepared a power point with information about terminology including accounts payable, accounts receivable, chart of accounts, cash vs. accrual accounting methods, calendar year vs. fiscal year, audits, generally accepted accounting principles, retained earnings, accrued expenses, restricted vs. unrestricted funds, and trustee designated funds. It included information about functional expense categories and how they relate to the Form 990 non-profit tax return that Forbes must file each year. The presentation also included explanations of the various reports she prepares each month including the Profit & Loss statement which shows income and expenses, Balance Sheet which shows assets and liabilities, and the Budget to Actual which compares the budgeted amounts to the Profit & Loss statement to allow the library to plan for cash flow. The trustees thanked her for preparing this and said it will be a great reference tool.

Jo Landers shared her screen and presented the Trustees Financial Reports for the period ending January 31, 2026 which include 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. She said she prepares these reports each month first for the Finance Committee who reviews them, then she makes any needed updates before presenting them to the full board. She said the library is doing well and is on track according to its budget. Most variances are due to timing issues and are explained in the notes. She said repairs can vary from year to year based on what comes up. Advertising and marketing income is from Google. She reviewed the Balance Sheet noting that inventory is no longer being updated as books and media purchases are being treated as expenses. Things now being recorded as expenses for major building projects will be moved to fixed assets when the project is completed. Other assets include prepaid expenses. Pre-paid expenses that fall within the same fiscal year are expensed all at

**Financial Reports** (continued)

once when they occur. Liabilities change annually and include accrued time off such as unpaid vacation time and sick leave. Personnel will at times appear to be over or under budget based on when the two 3-pay period months occur. Every 10 years or so there is a year with an extra pay period. She said that the budget does not include unrealized gains (changes in the value of the endowment portfolio) but does include actual distributions from the endowment. She said that Forbes is currently drawing about 3.5% annually. She reviewed the Coolidge Museum Redesign income and expense report and the HVAC Project income and expense report, showing the funds raised and the expenses paid to date. The trustees thanked her for the report.

Fred Kass made a motion to approve the January Financial Reports and place them on file. Anne Teschner seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

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

Lisa Downing reported that \$14,464.21 in undesignated gifts were received in January, including a \$5,000 gift. The following designated gifts were received since the last trustees' meeting: \$5,070 for the Children's Renovation project, \$105.15 for the Coolidge Fund, and \$51.50 for Adult Programming.

Lisa Downing said that the opportunity to appear on the poster, which will serve as a donor plaque for the Children's Department renovation, will be closing in mid-April. She said a temporary poster will be printed before it is finalized.

The following donations were received this month: 2 bronze reliefs (one by Leonard Baskin, one by Thomas Cornell), 5 wood engravings (three by Baskin, two by George Lockwood), 1 woodcut (Baskin), 1 broadside (Lance Hidy), 1 poster (Lockwood), and 2 lithographs (Lockwood), 12 items in total from the estate of Thomas Cornell; and framed artwork by George Lockwood: Homage to Odilon Redon, colored dry point, 6.5" x 6.5". Framed size is 12.25" x 12" also from the estate of Thomas Cornell. There were no receipts from sales/rents this month.

An update on fundraising was provided: Coolidge funding budgeted \$50,000, received \$23,920; Children's Renovation Project budgeted \$50,000, received \$30,835; Annual Appeal budgeted \$50,000, received \$89,700; Library Giving Day budgeted \$30,000, none received; Other budgeted \$67,100, received \$27,650.

Ruth Francis made a motion to accept the designated and undesignated gifts and donations as reported. Shelly Ruocco seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

**Next Meetings**

The next regular meeting of the trustees is scheduled for Thursday, March 26 at 4:00 PM. The trustees scheduled the following meetings for the remainder of the year: Thursday, April 16; Tuesday, May 19; Thursday, June 18; 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, March 4, 2026 at 6:30 PM. Shelly Ruocco will attend on behalf of the trustees.

**Department Report: Hampshire Room for Local History and Special Collections**

Copies of the report prepared by Dylan Gaffney for the Hampshire Room for Local History & Special Collections were distributed to the trustees prior to the meeting. Local history staff and volunteers were deeply involved in the creation of the "Slavery and Freedom in Northampton, 1654 to 1783" exhibit at Historic Northampton. The exhibit features 35 graphic silhouettes of men, women, and children who were enslaved here. On each graphic silhouette are details about individual lives based upon information gleaned from historic documents, including many entries drawn directly from documents in the Forbes Library Local History collections. In the Spring Semester of 2025, Forbes Library Staff, including Dylan Gaffney, Jill Emmons, and Heather Diaz collaborated with Kelly Anderson, Senior Lecturer in Archives Concentration, History, and the Study of Women and Gender at Smith College as part of a continued effort to diversify the historical record to include more LGBTQ+ voices and communities. This year, in collaboration with the Iron Horse/Parlor Room and Smith College, Forbes focused on developing an oral history project centered on Northampton's LGBTQ+ music scene and nightlife. In February 2021, Brian Turner, beloved local historian, and cartoonist passed away. Shortly before his death he donated to the library an extensive collection of alternative press and arts publications. In the Spring of 2025 Forbes was approached by his partner, Marsha Montori, who was seeking a home for research materials he had been compiling for a book project entitled "On the Brow of Round Hill: America's First and Most Surprising Progressive School". The collection includes extensive research materials about the experimental school (which ran from 1823-1834), its founders George Bancroft & Joseph Cogswell, and its students. As part of the continuing efforts to add collections of materials related to the rich history of Fine Press, Small Press, related art and Bookbinding in Western Massachusetts, Forbes has added a significant donation of materials from the Estate of Thomas Cornell, who received his undergraduate degree from Amherst College in 1959, studied with Leonard Baskin at Smith College, and was deeply connected with the Gehenna Press and other fine press publishers and artists in Western Massachusetts. Forbes Staff are currently working on a new plan for hanging additional art in public spaces throughout the library. This will be accompanied by a new Fine Arts Guide, and improved labeling to make the collection more accessible and increase public awareness about the collection.

Dylan Gaffney's report included a list of presentations and programming highlights including a Historic Northampton Zoom Program titled "Slavery and Freedom in Northampton" on Thursday, January 16, 2025; "Freedom Dreaming: Resistance, Resilience, and Repair in the Age of Trump" on February 27, 2025; "Disrupting Silences: Public Libraries as Leaders in Community Archiving" on June 29, 2025 at the American Library Association's annual meeting; a program at the Community Webs National Symposium in Philadelphia on June 25, 2025; "Slavery and Freedom in Northampton, 1654 to 1783: Document Study Day" in Historic Northampton's Shepherd Barn on September 13, 2025; and "Changing Main Street" with documentary filmmaker and photographer Stan Sherer on November 19, 2025. Elise Bernier-Feeley presented a talk on Sarah Edwards and her garden at First Church Windsor, CT on September 14, 2025.

Dylan Gaffney said that the art objects from the Cornell estate fit Forbes' criteria for having relevance to the local area. He said that when acquiring art one of the most important criteria is to bring in more diverse artists and subjects. He said he is in conversation with local photographers to get images of local musicians. Molly Moss said that a few years ago, Forbes

**Department Report** (continued)

received a \$10,000 bequest that the trustees matched with another \$10,000 to purchase art by BIPOC artists. Dylan Gaffney said he and Molly Moss have been looking at how to get more of the library's art collection on the walls and he is writing up a plan. Dylan Gaffney then showed the trustees several documents from the "Slavery and Freedom in Northampton" exhibit. He said working with this material is very sensitive and time consuming. Some of these documents were found in unexpected boxes. Over 600 documents were sent over to Historic Northampton for the exhibit, and have all now been digitized. Once the meta data has been finalized, they will be made available online in April. He also showed documents from the Iron Horse exhibit including many posters from the mid-1980s. There is a complete listing of musicians who performed there during the Jordi Herold era, but none after it was purchased by Eric Suher. When asked how the material is being made available to the public, Dylan Gaffney said much of the material is available online and that he is available by appointment and is also working on scheduling more public events.

When asked about department needs, Dylan Gaffney said that needs are primarily for space and expansion. Over the last 8 years, the Local History Collections have been expanding with an emphasis on cultural and political movements of the last 50 years, including local LGBTQIA+, music, arts, political activism, and journalism history. Additional space is needed for storage of new and current materials, updated shelving, processing space for staff, and perhaps a separate reading room for researchers. The LSTA Preservation Assessment Grant, to be completed by Fall 2026, should inform this work and provide some clear goals. He said that Forbes works very collaboratively with Historic Northampton in deciding where it makes the most sense for items to be housed. They each have their strengths and complement each other well.

The trustees thanked Dylan Gaffney for his report, and he left the meeting at 4:52 PM.

**Meeting and Grounds Use Policy and Fees**

Lisa Downing presented an updated policy and fee structure that includes parameters for community use of the new Hess Performance Stage in anticipation of opening it for the season in April. She said the revisions were largely to address the performance stage but also provided an opportunity to revisit the policy and fees in general. Eligibility has not changed, but there was some clean up around use requirements. One of the changes is that for groups over 50, the group must provide a second person in addition to the presenter to help with clean-up and crowd management. For groups over 200, which would apply only to the performance stage, the group must have a third person. The new booking form will make this clear. The library's Behavior Policy already forbids smoking and drinking on the property and that will apply to the outdoor stage as well. The language is more explicit around accessibility, requiring the use of a mic and amplification in the Community Room and Performance Stage. In line with the Behavior Policy, sound levels may not interfere with the use of the library or local noise ordinances. The library reserves the right to end an event at any time if it poses a safety risk or violates the policy.

Since outdoor events at the performance stage are being held in a public area that is open to adults and children of all ages and sensibilities, there is a

**Meeting and Grounds Use Policy and Fees** (continued)

provision in the policy that content should be appropriate for the library environment. For example, the library discourages programming that includes significant elements of sexually explicit imagery, graphic depictions of violence, or extensive explicit language. If an event contains an element that may be of concern under this policy, the organizer should discuss it with a library representative in advance of the event date. The trustees discussed this provision at length. In response to a question from Fred Kass, Lisa Downing said that people will submit a form requesting use of the space which is intended to provide enough information to decide if an event might be problematic. It will first be reviewed by the Adult Services team and then go to Lisa Downing and Molly Moss if necessary. The trustees said the policy must be clear enough to be consistently applied, and clear about who makes the decisions. They discussed several examples that might cause some questions. Anne Teschner said that in this day and age it would be hard to exclude any mentions of sex or violence. Molly Moss said that was not the intention of the policy, and proposals would be viewed in context. It was suggested that publicity for events should include trigger warnings for sensitive topics. The trustees felt the policy needed a bit more work around this issue. Lisa Downing said there is a request from a group at Smith College to stage the play *Antigone* in April and she would like to be able to say yes. Shelly Ruocco said that there should also be information in the policy about safety, care, and liability. The details of this will become evident as the stage is used. Ruth Francis asked if groups will be required to have insurance. Lisa Downing said the library's policy will cover liability. The trustees discussed this and said that groups charging admission should use their own insurance.

The trustees then reviewed the proposed changes to the fees which have not been updated in over 15 years. Lisa Downing distributed a chart showing suggested fees for various groups in each of the library's reservable spaces: the Bak Study Room, Watson Room, Community Room, and Performance Stage. Categories of events include free public or private events, professional tutoring and private lessons, business meetings and promotions, events with an admission fee, private parties, and after-hour events. The trustees then discussed various scenarios and under which category they would fall.

Lisa Downing will work on the policy incorporating the trustees' suggestions and bring it back to the trustees in March for their approval. In the meantime, Lisa Downing can say yes to the Smith group and let them know that the policy is forthcoming.

**FY2024 Audit**

Lisa Downing reported that Eric Nickolaison, Senior Accountant with Downey, Pieciak, Fitzgerald & Co., P.C. has completed the FY2024 Audit and requests that the trustees vote to approve it so it can be filed.

The auditor's opinion states "the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Trustees of the Forbes Library as of June 30, 2024 and 2023, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America."

**FY2024 Audit** (continued)

Shelly Ruocco made a motion to approve the FY2024 audit. Anne Teschner seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with Ruth Francis, Fred Kass, Shelly Ruocco, Lolana Sevilla, Anne Teschner, and Katy Wight all voting in favor.

**Committee Appointments**

Lisa Downing said she appreciated everyone promptly submitting committee assignment preferences. The following appointments were recommended for the President's approval: Development, Thursday, April 9 at 4:30 on zoom (Lolana Sevilla, Ruth Francis, Shelly Ruocco); Finance, Wednesday, March 11 at 11 hybrid (Ruth Francis, Chair, Anne Teschner); Personnel, Tuesday, March 10 at 4 in person (Shelly Ruocco, Chair, Katy Wight, Rebekah Anderson); Building and Grounds, Meeting date TBD (Katy Wight, Fred Kass, Rebekah Anderson); Coolidge Standing Committee, Monday, March 2 at 5 PM, hybrid (Fred Kass, Katy Wight); Racial and Social Justice Advisory Committee, Monday, April 13 at 4 PM on zoom (Anne Teschner, Lolana Sevilla).

Katy Wight asked for comments and then approved the appointments as recommended.

**Administrative Report**

Lisa Downing reported that she and Adam Novitt from Lilly Library presented an overview of the libraries that featured some of the recent initiatives to the City Council. Council members asked great questions and seemed pleased with the report.

A good initial response is being received from volunteers and donors to the event on Sunday, March 1 at 2 PM. Lisa Downing invited the trustees to take shifts at the welcome desk.

There is a handcrafted piece on display near the entry to the Reading Room featuring colorful crocheted hearts and the message "Love Your Library". It was created and gifted by local artist Eileen Travis.

This month in the gallery, "What We Do in the Shadows," is the biennial Forbes Staff Art Show. Artwork is on display with all of the library's departments represented, and artwork from work study students to the library director. The reception was last week, and Molly Moss had the pleasure of talking to many patrons about how talented Forbes' staff are.

The Friends have rescheduled the FDR Library field trip for May 8. Tickets are going first to those who had previously signed up for the trip and then will be opened to the general public on February 23, if any are remaining.

Save the date for the Trustee Award ceremony and concert on the Hess Performance Stage, Thursday, June 11 at 6:30 PM to celebrate Debin Bruce and JR Greene. Tracy Grammar and Jim Henry will perform at the event.

Harrison Greene, a long-time substitute staff member, has been hired into a position that incorporates work in Borrower Services and Facilities. He will be splitting his time between the two departments. He is a conscientious and hard-working employee, and Ms. Downing and Ms. Moss look forward to working with him in this new role.

**Administrative Report** (continued)

Kathy Mizula retired from Forbes this month after 45 years of service. She has worked as a library assistant in technical services for decades. Everyone wishes her all the best in her next chapter.

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

**Communications**

Lisa Downing received a letter dated February 6, 2026 from Representative Lindsay Sabadosa congratulating Forbes on receiving a \$21,240.18 grant through the Connected and Online Grant Program. The grant is to be used to provide access to education, workforce training, telehealth, and technology resources for the community. It will provide 35 devices from the Massachusetts Broadband Initiative which will circulate to patrons on premises.

**Discussion Topic: Introduction to Library Finances**

Lisa Downing said that over the next several meetings, the Discussion Topic time will be used to cover an important committee and functional area of responsibility for the Trustees. This month the Finance Committee, led by Ruth Francis, will give an introduction to library finances. Next month there will be an overview of Development, including the trustee committee and the Friends of Forbes and Coolidge Development committees.

Ruth Francis presented a power point on the library's finances. She gave a brief history of Forbes Library which was created with a bequest from the will of Charles Edward Forbes in 1876. It provided \$220,000 to establish a free public library with the purchase of land, construction of a building, purchase of books, and establishment of a Book Fund, Building Fund, and Aid Fund. The library's current funding comes from several sources including city appropriation (75.6%), grants and donations (23.6%), investment income (10.9%), and Friends of Forbes (4.9%). The city's appropriation to Forbes in FY2026 represents 1.1% of the city's total budget. She discussed the budget creation and monitoring processes. The total operating budget is \$2,070,660 with the following breakdown: personnel (70.6%), books and media (9.6%), facilities (7%), operations (5.2%), contracted services (3.9%), advertising and marketing (1.3%), supplies (1.2%), insurance (1%), and staff development (.2%). The Book & Media budget breaks down as follows: books (51.8%), databases and streaming (13.5%), ebooks (12.5%), periodicals (7.6%), DVDs (5.6%), library of things (4.5%), audio (2.6%), and video games (1.8%). The Facilities and Operations budget is \$144,478 and includes utilities, housekeeping and maintenance, repairs, and service contracts. Forbes' financial accounts include a local bank as well as the endowment portfolio managed by Bartholomew Inc., which is managed in perpetuity. Accounts at Bartholomew Inc. include discretionary, money market, and stock donation accounts. Reports include fund tracking and include donor restricted, board designated, and unrestricted funds. The asset allocation is 65% equities and 35% fixed income (bonds and cash). The holdings are diversified in mutual funds and ETFs. The library's investment policy includes a provision that the portfolio be fossil fuel free and weapons free. The withdrawal rate is determined by an average of the trailing 20 quarters to smooth out the bumps in the market. The Finance Committee is responsible for reviewing monthly statements, meeting with the investment manager at minimum once a year, reviewing monthly accounting reports, and reviewing the Investment Policy

**Discussion Topic: Introduction to Library Finances** (continued)

Statement at least annually. In response to a question from Fred Kass, Lisa Downing said that checks over \$10,000 require 2 signatures.

**Preliminary FY27 City Budget**

Lisa Downing reported that Forbes was instructed to submit a budget with a 3% increase that segregates the cost of implementing the new classification and compensation plan as a separate budget line. The library's operating costs have decreased this year due to anticipated savings in electricity realized through an LED light conversion project along with the solar credits that Forbes has from buying into the city's array. The budget submitted has an overall 4.06% increase or \$68,132 over the previous year. The Personnel line is an increase of 5.45% (\$78,562) and the Operating line is a decrease of 4.42% (-\$10,430). The increase in Compensation Plan Expenses over the current expired contract is \$33,540. This includes the increases in Medicare and PFML which are percentages of the overall personnel budget. She expects to be invited to meet to discuss the budget with the mayor in March and will keep the trustees informed.

**Reports from Subcommittees and Other Meetings**

Friends of Forbes - Ruth Francis attended the February meeting of the Friends of Forbes. Sarah Johnson presented to the Friends the same report she presented to the trustees last month. The Friends are working on the newsletter which will be distributed earlier than usual. Scott Monroe presented the treasurer's report. Their Bartholomew account topped over \$700K. Their checking ending balance was approximately \$35K, and the Friends want to start each year at \$30K. The Director's discretionary fund ended with a balance of \$43K. There was discussion of the FY26 budget, with specific mention of the increases in core requests to the book fund and adult & children programming. The Finance Committee is working on creating a list of 20 trailing quarters. The overall goal is to find a sensible approach to keep disbursements stable. They voted on disbursing approximately \$13K. The Finance Committee is working on a draft endowment policy statement which denotes spending income, not principal, except under special circumstances. A bingo committee will be formed to work on details for an upcoming event. Planning for the garden tour is underway, and they are having good luck with sponsors. Ticket prices will not increase this year. Lisa Downing gave an update which included the governor's released budget, presenting to City Council, and upcoming events and programs at Forbes.

Building and Grounds Committee - The next meeting of the Building and Grounds committee is TBD. Lisa Downing said that \$40,000 for repair of the front patio has been earmarked in the capital plan. The city is also looking at replacing the front doors, which are rotting, for an additional \$40,000.

Coolidge Standing Committee - Katy Wight reported that they continue to work with the consultant and are planning to gather data from stakeholders. The Valley Quilt Guild was approved to make a replica of a quilt used by Coolidge. Fundraising efforts continue with grant applications including a CPA funding request. There will be a day of giving next week on March 4. There are several panels planned for late spring including ones on recovery farms and the 1926 revenue act.

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

Development Committee - Lisa Downing reported that they are planning for Library Giving Day on April 2 which will be the final push of fundraising for the youth programming room. Their next meeting is April 9 at 4:30 PM via zoom.

Finance Committee - Ruth Francis reported that the Finance Committee met on February 11. The FY24 audit is complete with no known deficiencies. The FY25 audit is now underway, and it's anticipated that the FY26 audit will start in August. In reviewing the current FY budget, the following changes were noted: electricity was reduced from \$83K to \$60K (LED conversion + solar credits); operating budget is down 4.42% (\$10K) despite other increases; and one retirement position is being held at reduced hours if needed for budget flexibility. The committee reviewed options for implementing the wage increases based on the compensation study. The budget will be submitted to the city for review and a meeting with the mayor is anticipated in March. In reviewing cash on hand, it was suggested that \$200,000 be maintained in the Florence Bank accounts. The reason is that this amount covers one full payroll plus one month of operating expenses with some cushion. Cash in excess of this amount would be sent to the money market account at Bartholomew Inc. Ruth Francis was confirmed to continue as chair of the Finance Committee. The committee is meeting with Bartholomew Inc. on February 23 and the auditor on March 11. The next Finance Committee meeting is March 11.

Personnel Committee - Shelly Ruocco reported that they met on February 3. They reviewed the trustees' committee requests and made assignments. Then they reviewed the personnel line of the budget that would be submitted to the city. They talked briefly about a way to increase the staff gift card amount in 2026, if the budget permits. They had a very brief discussion about performance improvement plans and a plan/timeline for an employee struggling. PFML was discussed including its taxation. Molly Moss and Lisa Downing are pursuing clarity on questions related to this topic. Another legal question was whether Forbes has or should have insurance for trustees. They decided to have a separate meeting on February 11 to discuss contract negotiations with the Forbes Library Employee Association (FLEA). So far, no concerns have been brought to the Committee regarding committee assignments. They had a brief discussion of upcoming orientations: Finance (30 min.) in February and Development (less than 30 minutes) in March. April is to be assigned. After the February 26 trustee meeting, Molly Moss will remove everyone's personal emails from all groups and other communications. They discussed various options for budget negotiations with the City. The city wants a 3-year spread of increases and to have these adjustments on a separate line outside the budget. It was agreed that it didn't make sense to start FLEA negotiations until Forbes has met with the city regarding the budget.

Racial and Social Justice Advisory Group - Anne Teschner reported that their next meeting is scheduled for April 13 at 4 PM. They plan to invite representatives from the city's youth commission.

**Other Business**

There was no other business.

At 6:10 PM, Shelly Ruocco moved to adjourn the meeting. Fred Kass seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 PM.