

WHITING LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

DRAFT Minutes – August 10, 2021

Trustees Present: Robert Nied, Lyza Danger Gardner, Donna Schields, Ed Grossman, David Lord and Cathy Hasbrouck.

Citizens Present Deirdre Doran, Rosamund Conroy.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Robert Nied, Chair, at 8:31 AM on the Zoom platform.

APPROVE MINUTES FROM July 13, 2021

A motion was made (Ed, Lyza) to accept the minutes from July 13, 2021. There was no discussion. A vote was taken and the minutes were approved unanimously.

TREASURER’S REPORT

Ed Grossman said the finances were in order. Revenues are down due to the pandemic. The June fundraising drive revenues are down about \$4,200. Revenues from the book sale, copier fees, fines, lost items and non-resident fees were down about \$4,100. Donations not associated with fundraising were up about \$550, which offsets some of that shortfall. The total revenue shortfall is \$7,800.

Ed noted that payroll and payroll expenses are down from last year, which helps offset the revenue shortfall. There was also \$11,000 in unspent money for supplies and equipment. He anticipated that some of that money would be needed if the library remains open to in-person visitors. Spending in that category might have to be constrained toward the end of the year if revenues don’t recover.

Ed said the money market account balance continues to gain less than one percent. The Preservation Fund had gained about 1.2 % since the preceding month. There has been no confirmation on the name change process. A decision to execute the investment policy to spend 3 – 5 % on health care costs from the Preservation Fund will be made toward the end of fiscal 2021.

Ed expressed concern over the possible impact of the COVID delta variant and the possible re-implementation of safety measure that could close the building to the public again. He left other updates on fundraising to the report from the fundraising committee.

Robert Nied asked Ed if there was any indication that taking the 3 – 5% from the preservation would be more helpful now than later. Ed said that the June fund drive results were lower than last year and he believed the flow from the drive is over. He suggested taking the preservation fund money would be appropriate in October.

A motion was made (Lyza, Donna) to accept the Treasurer’s Report. The report was approved as presented unanimously.

FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE REPORT

Lyza said the committee was looking at the tasks involved in a fund drive and breaking them down into workable pieces in order to expand the drive to other platforms. She said the work in August concerned updating the donor mailing list: purging unproductive names, getting voter registration and property transfer records from the Town Hall to mine for new names and using a list of deaths to adjust the list. About 70 new records have been added to the Kindful database and a few records were updated with mailing addresses.

In September the committee plans to work on a physical asset refresh: mailing templates, return envelopes and thank-you notes. They will also begin work on a schedule and checklist for trustees in the November drive. She expects to pull together the many components for the fund drive in October. The committee is strongly considering making the postal drive an annual instead of semi-annual event to be done in November. The next meeting of the fundraising committee is Thursday September 9 at 4:00 PM.

Ed thanked Lyza for her help in guiding him through using Kindful. He had concerns about the complexity of understanding issues such as when two donors with the same last name and same mailing address are found on a donation check. How can one know whether this is a married couple, two siblings, a parent and child or some other relationship? He hoped that some kind of administrative note could be made in the Kindful database that could help the writer of the thank-you note know to whom to address the thank-you note. Lyza said human intelligence is needed to sort something like that out. She said she hoped to bring at least 1 or 2 more trustees into the Kindful context to supplement Ed's efforts and hers.

Lyza said that the library is using the cheapest version of Kindful, which has a limit of 1,000 contacts. The library currently has about 650. She thought that the library may be ready to expand past 1,000 contacts within two years.

Robert Nied thanked Ed and Lyza for their efforts and said he thought Kindful is proving to be a very useful tool for the library and it was a good decision to bring it on board. Robert and Lyza thanked Cathy for bringing the voter registration, PTTR and death data into the process.

DIRECTOR/YOUTH SERVICES REPORT

Deirdre said July was the first full month the library had been open in 2021. She reported that the majority of visitors don't wear masks at the library, but many children do. Staff and volunteers are currently allowed to choose whether or not to wear a mask. The Youth Services librarian, Carrie King, wears a mask whenever children are in the Youth Services Room. About 50% of visitors at the library have been tourists.

The library volunteers are back at work. There are four returning volunteers and one new volunteer. They mostly work 2-hour shifts, shelving and helping Carrie prepare craft kits for children. The library has received a lot of used book donations. One volunteer, Allison, has been helping Deirdre organize the donations. Used book sales are also up. Tourists have been buying used books. Deirdre pointed out that two-thirds of the book sale revenue historically comes from the September book sale. For that reason, she doesn't see book store revenue as lagging behind the previous year.

Deirdre said the book club had its first hybrid (both in-person and via Zoom) meeting this month. It was also the first in-person book club meeting Deirdre has hosted. She felt that offering a hybrid meeting would be useful even after COVID. She has purchased a camera and multi-directional microphone to facilitate hybrid meetings. She said it could be used for other meetings held at the library, but she did not plan on lending the equipment out.

The adult summer reading program had a similar format to last year. The emphasis was on diversifying your reading. She had about 12 people participate and there were no in-person activities. There were many activities for the children's summer reading program. About 69 children signed up. There were weekly environmental education programs presented in the library's back yard by the Nature Museum from Grafton. The events were very successful.

Story time was held every Friday outside where masks were not needed. It is hoped story time can be held outside for another two months. A decision on how to proceed indoors will be made when the cold weather arrives.

The Community Survey wrapped up in July with a response rate of 5%, or 180 responses. Deirdre found reading through the free-form answers was very informative. She acknowledged that such a small sampling is not particularly representative of the town but noted that there was a unity in the content of the responses which gave her confidence in a consensus among the people who chose to respond. She said she was working on charting some of the data to use in the Strategic Planning Community Conversations. She said the Strategic Planning Committee is working on gathering a group of 20 – 25 citizens to attend the conversations on September 7th and October 5th. They are extending personal invitations to specific individuals. The committee will meet Friday to go over the format for the conversation.

Deirdre said nothing concrete has happened with the electrical or heating system problems. She complimented her staff on how well they handled the abrupt transition from having no one from the public in the building to being flooded with visitors.

Robert Nied asked Deirdre for a report on the overflow of the exterior drain outside the community room door, which soaked part of the rug and created a musty smell downstairs. Deirdre said the problem had been caused by landscaping work done on the abutting property. A quantity of leaves got into the drain. Deirdre said she is accustomed to clearing the drain of leaves in the fall, but she didn't immediately notice this problem. She had brought in a few dehumidifiers and opened the windows to air out the basement.

Robert Nied said this also pointed out a problem with the heating system. Air circulation in the basement is poor because one of the heating system units is shut off. He said he had discussed the issue again with the folks at the Town Hall. He said the town is, to some degree, at the mercy of contractors and hoped this issue could be resolved before the start of the heating season.

Robert celebrated the fact that the library was only open 17 days in July and had 900 visitors. He felt the survey results were valuable despite being sparse. He thought it would be very helpful in the Strategic Planning process. He was struck by the fact that the largest number of responses were about the development of an outside space. He felt that was part of the lessons learned from COVID and it needs to be a central part of the Strategic Plan.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Suzy Forlie Memorial Committee update**

David Lord said the next meeting of the Suzy Forlie Memorial Committee would take place that evening. He said the committee had procured the services of a number of people to work on the space, including an interior designer and painter. He said the committee has lined up some financial pledges from the memorial committee members for the project which had amounted to \$1,000. He said the people who had pledged money were all members of the memorial committee. The committee had solicited pledges in order to show the Board of Trustees that it had the interest, resolve and means to carry the project through. David noted that a number of people on the current Board of Trustees had not known Suzy and were not acquainted with what she had done for the library. He said most of the members of the memorial committee knew Suzy well enough that she is still a living presence in their lives. David hoped that the matter of a memorial to Suzy Forlie could be brought to a vote very soon.

A lengthy discussion followed which is summarized here.

The memorial committee had agreed that they wanted to name a room inside the library as a memorial to Suzy Forlie. They had enlisted Stephanie Whitney Payne, a retired interior decorator and former library trustee who had put together a layout for the room and recommended a paint color, lighting, rug, furnishings and window covering. They had lined up a painter. They had prepared a high-level budget and recruited some pledges from committee members. The memorial committee hoped that the trustees would pass a motion to approve or endorse the plan.

The trustees were concerned about financial aspects of the plan for the reasons:

- The planned project represented expenditures which had not been part of the budget process. This was called the wiggly line which could not be crossed.
- The trustees were concerned that the pledges for the project could cannibalize the library donor list during a fiscal year already showing a lack of income due to COVID.
- The trustees were concerned that the pledges would not be recorded in the Kindful database, which is how the library is now managing both the donor activity and its fiduciary responsibilities and thank-you note process.
- The trustees were concerned that the library does not allow funds to be donated with an earmark for a specific project. Donated funds are received by the treasurer and allocated where the library needs them most. If the choice is to use funds to keep the library open or use funds to paint a room, the trustees' duty is to keep the library open.

The library needs the flexibility to reallocate space within the building as conditions warrant. The Suzy Forlie Memorial Reading Room project does fit Deirdre's plan to have more comfortable seating for reading. Deirdre is very happy to set up the reading room and name it after Suzy. However, if, in the future the library needs something else, such as a multimedia room, and no longer needs reading room space, the room would be re-purposed. It must be made clear to donors that the reading room they are making a donation for may not remain a reading room forever.

The town of Chester owns the library building and is responsible for maintaining it. Maintenance would include the heating system, plumbing, electricity, and exterior surfaces including the roof. It did not include things like painting, lighting fixtures and changing light bulbs. The memorial committee proposal included some electrical wiring which would be undertaken by the town.

Deirdre said she had planned to add some more comfortable seating for reading before the memorial committee had made its proposal. Better seating was the second most requested change in the Strategic Planning survey. It was noted that this aspect of the memorial project clearly aligns with the library's strategic goals. Deirdre had some grant money that she had planned to spend on more comfortable chairs and side tables that could hold laptop computers. This could reduce the cost of the memorial project.

Deirdre wanted to know when she was allowed to make changes like that on her own and when she needed the trustees' permission. It was settled that Deirdre could move furniture and reallocate space without asking the trustees' permission.

The electrical wiring expense the memorial committee anticipated should be paid for by the town, as it falls under building maintenance and might be addressed when the electrician comes to fix the exterior lights.

At the end of the discussion, it was agreed that the memorial committee would formally request that the fireplace room be named the Suzy Forlie Reading Room at the next board of trustees meeting. It would present a more detailed budget for the project, more information about how the new room would look, (though not a full mock up) and more details about planned fundraising.

Robert Nied said he appreciated the work the memorial committee had done and acknowledged that the project was beginning to take shape. He thought it will be a very nice tribute to Suzy Forlie.

- Discussion of returning to in-person Trustees meetings

Zoom meetings will continue for the time being for these reasons:

- It was easier to have a meeting with screens and documents available,
- for some people less travel is helpful,
- there is safety from the delta variant in remote meetings.

Deirdre will be present at the library to support the required physical location of the meeting and welcome any members of the public. The open meeting law changed on June 15th when the state achieved its vaccination goals and removed COVID restrictions. Meetings must have a designated physical space. She thought a hybrid meeting format would be helpful during this phase of COVID and in the future.

David proposed that a face-to-face social meeting be held monthly.

No motion was made to change the format of the meeting.

- Options for coverage of staff vacation/time off schedules
 - Engaging the Personnel Committee

Robert explained that there had been a time when both librarians wanted the same days off. The conflict was resolved internally, but Robert felt it was important that the library have a plan in place to handle such an event in the future. He suggested that the issue be sent to the Personnel Committee, who could consider ideas such as a list of on-call volunteers or extending the hours of the library assistant. The Personnel Committee will meet next on Zoom on August 31st at 9:00 AM and discuss this.

NEW BUSINESS

Recommendation of Rosamund Conroy to Select Board as a new Trustee

A motion was made (Donna, David) to nominate Rosamund Conroy to the Select Board to fill the remainder of Colleen Garvey's term as a Library Trustee. The term will end in March 2023. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There being no members of the public present, there was no public comment.

ADJOURN

A motion (Lyza Donna) was made to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Hasbrouck, Secretary