Whiting Library, Chester, Vermont

Regular Meeting of Board of Trustees

Meeting Notes – December 10, 2024

In attendance at the Whiting Library Community Room: Bill Dakin, Gail Zachariah, Jessie Krust, Matt Gorsky, Donna McNeill-Hudkins, Lyn Smith, Marilyn Mahusky and Carrie King, Youth Librarian . Attended via ZOOM –Lora Cokolot

Public Attendance: None

Bill Dakin called meeting to order at 6:30 PM

Additions to the Agenda –None

Approve Minutes from November 12, 2024 – motion to approve. Approved with change in text – that fundraiser letter is going out the week after Thanksgiving per Jessie Krust.

Treasurer Financial Report

Lora presenting the financial report for November. The actual revenue was at $184,129, including grant money, and payroll expenses were at $110,318. Total other expenses were at $45,962. Lora also mentioned that they were working with Remus Preda, the Vice President, regarding a CD transfer. The conversation ended with some confusion about the availability of certain documents, which were eventually provided.

Lora discussed her ongoing efforts with M&T Bank to open a 12-month CD at a 3.4% rate, with a verbal confirmation expected soon. She also reported on the wealth management account, which had reached $181,703. Lora highlighted the success of Gail's grant writing, reaching $37,200 in grants, and the achievement of their book sales goal. She also mentioned the receipt of a $7,000 check for fundraising and anticipated more donations and fundraising money before the end of the month. A question was raised about the timing of receiving checks and their impact on the fiscal year, which Lora confirmed would depend on when the checks were posted. Lora also revealed that the $7,000 donation was received from Donald and Jean Showalter of Scarborough, Maine.

Lora discussed the library's financial situation, including the $7,000 expense and the $27,000 surplus. They also discussed the possibility of being open on THursdays, which was to be addressed in the directors' report. There was concern about the display of grant money in the budget and suggested hiring a professional to help with this. Lora proposed the idea of hiring an accountant for a one-time consultation to improve the budget display. They agreed to discuss this further with Laurie.

Youth Services Report

Carrie discussed the Youth Services report and highlighted an issue with the library's closure on Tuesdays following Monday Federal holidays. She pointed out that this decision reduced access to the library on days when public schools were closed, which were also popular days for library events. Suggested considering a compromise or being aware of the situation's impact on day-to-day operations. The team agreed that the confusion stemmed from the library's policy of closing the following day if a holiday fell on a day the library was not open. They also discussed the need to think about other ways to compensate staff for holidays.

The board discussed the challenges of implementing a new policy regarding staff holidays and the potential impact on staff morale and public access. They acknowledged the need to address the issue, but also recognized the complexities involved, such as tracking hours worked and ensuring equitable treatment for all employees. The team agreed to revisit the policy and consider alternative solutions, with the aim of improving the situation for both staff and the public. They decided to involve the Policy Committee in the decision-making process and to fast-track the issue for discussion at the January meeting.

Discussed the library's past and current operations, including the introduction of flexible time for staff during the closure of the library on Mondays. This change was made to improve staff's work-life balance and to align with the library's new hours of operation. (when they changed the days closed to Sunday and Monday so the staff would have 2 days off) There is a need for better tracking of staff's time off and the potential for changes in the library's budget if the current system is altered. The team also discussed the library's programs and the positive feedback received from patrons. We ended the conversation by expressing the need for a recommendation from the policy committee regarding the library's operations.

Director's Report

Gail presented a strategic plan report, detailing the progress made on the library's strategic plan. The report will be reviewed and discussed in the next meeting. Gail also proposed extending the library's opening hours to one to seven on Thursdays, which would require additional staff. The proposal was met with mixed reactions, with some members expressing concerns about the financial implications with additional "man hours" and pay. The board asked Gail for a formal proposal. The proposal was carried forward to the next agenda for further discussion.

Fundraising

Jessie discussed the progress of the fundraising efforts, highlighting the successful delivery of fundraising letters and the anticipation of a substantial gift. The team also discussed the need for a clear policy on the management of the endowment fund, with Matt suggesting that the group should develop a direction for how much money is appropriate to keep in the fund. Lora and Bill were tasked with this responsibility. Additionally, There are concerns about the complexity of the budget and suggested seeking professional advice to better organize it.

2025 Budget – Presented to Chester and Andover. No info back from towns yet.

Policy Discussions – will move to next month.

Physical Plant Grants –

Gail discussed the town's grant for physical plant improvements, including HVAC system upgrades, insulation, and ADA improvements. The project's timeline and potential disruptions to library operations were uncertain. Gail also raised the possibility of using a separate grant for carpeting, despite potential restrictions.

New Business: Donna shared information she had received on the "original intent" of giving the Health Care Stipend to our employees to increase their overall compensation at the time when salaries were much lower.

The team discussed the annual physical or anniversary date physical evaluation for employees. They agreed that the evaluation should be based on the anniversary date of hire, with a review before the end of the fiscal year. The team also discussed the budget for salary increases, with a proposed increase of around 2-3% based on the inflation rate. They considered using a performance review tool, with a focus on areas such as administration, budget, personnel, supervision, library collection, public community relations, and professional development. The team decided to finalize the document and share it with Gail, with a deadline for completion before the next meeting.

Donna, Lora, and Marilyn discussed the town's health insurance stipend policy. They agreed that the stipend should not be reduced and should be considered part of the total compensation package. They also discussed the possibility of increasing salaries and offering a stipend for health insurance instead. The team decided to maintain the status quo for the current fiscal year and write a policy for the next year. They also considered the potential political repercussions of changing the policy. The team agreed to revisit the issue in the next budget year.

The board then moved into an executive session to discuss personnel matters, this was two part, to discuss Gail's annual review and to discuss benefits.

Returned from Executive Session at 8:20 PM

Public Comments – NO PUBLIC

Next regular meeting is January 14th at 6:30 PM

Motion to adjourn approved. Adjourned at 8:27 pm

ACTION ITEMS FROM MEETING:

• Policy Committee to review and propose updates to the personnel policy, including holiday closures and health insurance stipends.

• Gail to check if the carpeting grant can be used to purchase carpeting for later installation.

• Donna to finalize and distribute the director evaluation form to all trustees and Gail.

• All trustees to complete the director evaluation form before the next meeting.

• Laura to find out more about hiring an accountant to help with budget reporting.

• Gail to write up a formal proposal for opening the library on Thursdays from 1-7 PM.

• Jesse to pick up fundraising letters from trustees on Saturday at noon and take them to Town Hall on Monday for mailing.

• Laura to notify the investment advisors about the board's decision on fund distribution.

• Gail to provide a list of planned facility improvements from the town's energy grant.

• Board to review the strategic plan report for discussion at the next meeting.

• Gail to check with Jody Peebles about potentially speaking at a Select Board meeting about library programs.

• Lora to research free software options for tracking employee time off.

Submitted by Donna McNeill-Hudkins