

**Meeting of the Library Board of Trustees
Conant Public Library
Sterling, MA
Minutes of October 18, 2021**

Open Meeting:

Call to order 7:00 pm

Roll Call:

Present: Trustees Akerson, Carlin, Petullo, Martin, Sayut, and Scannell; Library Director Betsy Perry (all in person)

Absent: None

Members of the public present: Arden Sonnenberg

Review/Approve September 13, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Chairperson Petullo noted that a cost estimate for the elevator project was incorrectly reflected in the minutes. Trustee Scannell recalled a brief discussion regarding the building subcommittee that had not been captured by the minutes.

Motion to accept with amendments: Akerson. Second: Carlin. Trustee Martin abstained since she was not present at the September 13 meeting. Otherwise the vote was unanimous.

Circulation

Director Perry reported that circulation, although down from August, is strong. She speculated that busy school schedules and fine weather may account for the downtick. She further reported that programming is also strong, with a number of very popular programs taking place for all ages.

Trustee Carlin inquired about magazine circulation. Director Perry remarked that, currently, hard copy magazines are hard to find and that the library does not subscribe to very many and that, perhaps as a result, magazines do not frequently circulate. She said she would like to determine whether circulation would increase or not given more selection and better placement. Chairperson Petullo suggested asking staff at Townsend and West Boylston libraries, both of which have robust periodical sections. Director Perry said she could check in with her Directors' listserv.

Finance

Director Perry reported that, at 25% through the fiscal year, overall spending was right on track at 24%. Trustee Carlin asked when the salary budget line would begin to reflect Director Perry's salary as opposed to former Director Pat Campbell's salary. Director Perry expected that this will occur in the next monthly budget, which would reflect October expenditures. She also noted that the wages and salary line was also right on track at 21% spent.

Youth

Director Perry reported that children's programs have been extremely popular, with many filling up quickly. Alisa Iannucci, the new Director of Youth Services, is settling in well, reviving old programs, adding new programs, doing outreach to Sterling teachers, and organizing her workspace.

Director's Report

Director Perry reported that she is also settling in well, familiarizing herself with the collections and facilities. She noted that she is in communications with the senior center to see how the library can offer intergenerational and dementia-friendly programming.

Building Subcommittee

Trustee Scannell, a member of the building subcommittee, reported that the subcommittee's recommendation is to adopt a straight-through configuration for the lift, which would increase access for mobility scooters. As a next step, they ask that the trustees vote to explore the costs associated with this option by commissioning an architectural drawing by LLB, an architectural consulting firm with library expertise. Trustee Scannell anticipated that these drawings would cost about \$4,000 - \$5,000. Trustee Carlin clarified that a quote for the lift and installation has already been provided by Garaventa, and that the costs that need further exploration are those associated with outside contractors (electrical work, carpentry, etc., to ready the space for installation of the lift). Trustee Scannell said that an inventory and estimate of those costs would be included in the materials prepared by LLB, and noted that the subcommittee felt it was worthwhile to spend the extra funds in order to gain information that could be drawn upon now or in the future.

Member of the public Arden Sonnenberg suggested that Garaventa might have its own consulting arm that may be more cost effective.

Chairperson Petullo stressed that the current lift is ADA compliant and fully functioning. As confirmed in an email from a representative of the MA Board of Library Commissioners, a malfunction in the current lift would not require closing the library assuming repairs were being perused quickly and in good faith. She agreed that increased access would be desirable, but argued that it would be more fiscally responsible to address that in the future as part of a larger expansion, and to focus at this time on ensuring that a reliable, ADA-complaint lift is in place. Other trustees also commented that they felt reluctant to spend more funds to determine a cost estimate that could in the end be prohibitively high. Chairperson Petullo was in favor of returning some extra funds, which had been allocated to the library at a prior town meeting and earmarked for feasibility studies, to the town.

Member of the public Sonnenberg stressed that, if the library returned the excess, it would have no further claim to the funds, as it is only available to be spent on feasibility studies as voted by Sterling taxpayers. She also noted that the town has received a distribution of federal funds, which the Select Board will soon be allocating among town departments. She said that if the library may qualify for some of these funds if it can identify shovel-ready projects.

Trustees inquired whether library staff or patrons have identified increased lift access as an unmet need. Director Perry said that the staff reports that the current lift is not frequently used.

For purposes of clarity, Chairperson Petullo enumerated the three options under consideration.

- Option 1 would entail taking no action at this time, allowing the lift to run out its lifespan (expected to be another 3-4 years, per the manufacturer) and addressing repairs as needed.
- Option 2 would be to replace the current lift, but would maintain the existing configuration to minimize the need for additional electrical, carpentry, brickwork, etc. The new lift would have an expected lifespan of about 20 years. Funds for this option, quoted at about \$34,000, would be requested at the next town meeting.
- Option 3 would be to replace the existing lift with a straight-through lift, thereby increasing access to mobility scooters. Leftover feasibility funding would be used to determine what the total cost would be, and this amount would be requested at the next town meeting. This option had the support of the building subcommittee.

Trustee Martin noted that Option 1, although it would not require a funding request at town meeting, does entail some financial risk. Records show that repair costs in some recent years have been significant, totaling about \$12,000 since 2018. Since there was not much support on the board or subcommittee for this option, Trustee Carlin suggested that a vote be taken to eliminate it from consideration.

Motion to remove Option 1 (that is, to take no action on the lift at this time, to address repairs as needed and replace the lift at the end of its lifespan) from consideration: Carlin. Second: Akerson. Unanimous.

With trustee support coalescing around Option 2, it was brought to vote.

Motion to move forward with Option 2 (that is, to replace the current lift but maintain the existing layout and configuration): Carlin. Second: Akerson. In favor: Martin, Petullo, Sayut. Opposed: Scannell.

Trustee Scannell asked if there was any remaining need for the building subcommittee. Chairperson Petullo and Director Perry confirmed that staff would liaise with vendors going forward.

Motion to dissolve the building subcommittee, with thanks for a job well done and for the provision of a great deal of valuable information: Akerson. Second: Carlin. In favor: Martin, Petullo, Sayut. Opposed: Scannell.

Policy Review

Director Perry distributed a copy of the reference policy for review by trustees. She proposed a number of changes to reflect the fact that reference assistance is within the purview of all library staff. References to the Fitchburg Law Library were also removed, since it is no longer in operation.

Motion to accept the Director Perry's proposed changes to the reference policy: Carlin. Second: Akerson. Unanimous.

Director Perry distributed a copy of the Board of Trustees by-laws for review. Trustee Carlin noted that, throughout the document, the antiquated term "librarian" was used seemingly in reference to the library director. Director Perry said she would make the terminology change.

Strategic planning

Director Perry reported that a new strategic plan would start at the beginning of FY2023 and run through FY2027, giving the trustees and staff eight months to compile the plan. She recommended creating a subcommittee comprising 2-3 trustees, 2-3 library staff members, and 7-8 additional community members. She estimated a time commitment of four evening meetings over the course of the eight-month process. She added that while she is comfortable leading the strategic planning process in-house, it might be worthwhile to hire a consultant to run focus groups to ensure impartiality.

Member of the public Sonnenberg recommended the town master planner Judy Bartlett for this purpose, and noted that there may be a library section in the current town master plan. She suggested asking the building administrative assistant Patty Page for a copy of the master plan.

Director Perry said that trustees should aim to create the subcommittee next month and conduct focus groups in January/February, in order to have the strategic report ready by October 2022 at the latest. This would allow the library to meet the deadline to request funding from the LSTA.

Next posted meeting date: November 15, 2021

Motion to adjourn: Akerson. Second: Carlin

Unanimous

Adjournment: 8:28 pm

Amanda Sayut, Secretary