

Groton Public Library Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 12, 2023, at 7 pm, Library Community Room
Approved, 1/9/2024

Attending in Person: Library Trustees Helena Altsman, Kate Bettencourt, Mark Gerath, Jennifer Petersen, Kristen von Campe, and David Zeiler. Also Library Assistant Director Sarah Breen. **Attending via Zoom:** Library Director Vanessa Abraham

Call to Order: Kate Bettencourt, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

Vote Summary

- Approval of November 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes. Moved by Kristen von Campe, seconded by Mark Gerath. 6 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstention.
- Approval of December 4, 2023 Meeting Minutes. Moved by Kristen von Campe, seconded by Mark Gerath. 6 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstention
- Kristen von Campe moved that up to \$200 be expended from the Gift Fund for four \$50 gift cards from local businesses as rewards for completing the Community Survey. Seconded by Mark Gerath. 6 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstentions.
- Kristen von Campe moved that up to \$1,600 be expended from LIG/MEG to cover the costs of printing and mailing the Community Survey.
- Kristen von Campe moved that the GPL make an exception to its “No Solicitation” policy for ANSWER (an Ayer based charity to provide assistance for people in Emergency Assistance Shelter) and allow a donation box to receive essentials on a 3-month trial basis. Seconded by Mark Gerath. 6 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstention
- Adjourn. Moved by Kristen von Campe, seconded by Mark Gerath. 6 ayes, 0 nays, 0 abstention.

Action Items

- Mark Gerath to attend Select Board/Town Manager budget meeting on December 18.
- Vanessa Abraham to follow up with Lois Young to inform her of our granting an exemption to our “No Solicitation” policy for ANSWER
- Vanessa Abraham to follow up with Babin Landscaping to fully understand the scope of work completed on the building envelope below grade at the front of the GPL
- Mark to draft a formal response to the Select Board, Finance Committee, and Town Manager about the recent town comparisons and library expenditures

New Business

Community Survey

- The Trustees provided minor feedback and comments on the proposed Community Survey, a part of our quinquennial strategic planning exercise. They agreed that it was a good first draft, and with help from Barbara Alevras (our outside consultant), it will be a valuable tool in assessing the opinions of our patrons and Groton citizens.
- Kristen moved, and Mark seconded, expenditure of up to \$200 from the Gift Fund to be used to purchase raffle prizes of 4 gift cards from local businesses to entice citizens to complete the Community Survey. Unanimously approved. (See vote summary)

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Unfinished Business

Approval of Meeting Minutes from Nov. 14, 2023 Meeting

- Completed, see vote summary.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from Dec. 4, 2023 Meeting

- Completed, see vote summary.

Report on Action Items from Previous Meetings

- All action items reviewed.

Review Trustees' Calendar for Current Month

- All calendar items reviewed.

Review Monthly Bills

- All library bills reviewed.

Standing Committee & Liaison Reports:

Budget & Finance

Review FY 2025 Library Budget and Report on Meeting with Town Manager

- Town Manager Mark Haddad gave broad general support to our level services budget. Mark H. indicated that he supported the funding of Sunday and Summer hours. Mark H. seems intent on using the balance of our State funds to fund our operations, but understands the need to meet the municipal appropriation requirement (MAR) for state certification. This meeting included information and data regarding the town budget, which needs an override to remain level funded. In preparation for a potential budget shortfall, the town elders have indicated that there may be an 11% reduction to the town budget, with a proposal to reduce the GPL budget by \$108,000. Of course, the proposed cuts would have an inordinate impact on our opening hours as lowest paid workers would be let go first, personnel who cover summer and Sunday hours. Despite the dire fiscal funding shortfall discussions, it was a good meeting but no firm funding commitments were made.

Trust Commissioners Report

- Mark Gerath reported that the meeting with the Town Trust Commissioners was collegial and productive. The Trust Commissioners were supportive of our stewardship of the GPL. They approved our \$75,000 request, which was \$5,000 more than last year's request.

New Monthly Budget Report (Helena)

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- Helena, in consultation with Mark, has consolidated the GPL budget onto one spreadsheet, which includes both expenditures and funding sources in one document. The B&F team believes that this will provide a helpful framework in building future budgets as well as monitoring current cash flow.

Community Survey Funding

- Kristen moved, and Mark seconded, that up to \$1,600 from LIG/MEG be expended to print and mail the community survey. Passed unanimously, see details above.

Budget & Finance Updates

- Mark is working on statistical analysis of the financial differences between library budgets in the comparison towns from the recent town findings. He will work with Helena and Vanessa on a response to send to the Town Manager & FinCom in January.

Building & Equipment

Project Updates

- Babin Front Regrading Work was completed recently. They excavated to the left (as you are facing the building) of the front stairs, and installed barriers as needed. They have regraded the garden beds to slope from the building. Hopefully this will stop the slow seep into the old “coal room” on the second floor.

Building & Equipment Updates

- The Babin Landscaping Irrigation department has automatically come to winterize the irrigation system since they have taken over the contract. This year they did not and it froze, resulting in a broken backflow preventer. They have come to repair the damage and will cover the costs as it was their mistake.

Policy, Personnel, & Planning

Strategic Planning Updates

- SOAR Workshops have been proceeding apace, with focus groups of Parents as well as influential people in Groton and town government. The Library Trustees and GPL Endowment Trustees workshop was productive and thought provoking. The Youth Survey is complete, with a very high rate of participation. As above, the GPL Trustees approved an expenditure of \$200 for gift cards as raffle rewards for adults who complete a survey. We are looking forward to viewing the results of the Strategic Planning report.

Ayer Shelter Collection Request

- Lois Young asked us to make an exception and allow the collection of basic necessities and other non-food items for the emergency shelter in Ayer. After a robust discussion,

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the Trustees unanimously agreed to allow an exemption from our “no solicitation” policy for a 3-month trial period. See vote summary above for details.

PPP Updates:

- Challenges from a well-organized minority to Library Services continue to be a national and state concern. Luckily the GPL has avoided such challenges thus far, but Vanessa and the staff continue to train on this issue and are ready to diffuse any pre-planned assaults on intellectual freedom.

Other Reports:

GPL Endowment:

- As anticipated, after the autumnal GPL Endowment letter was mailed, the endowment has been receiving a steady stream of donations. The number of individual donations remains very strong.

Art & Artifacts:

- The archiving of the Groton Herald has hit yet another wrinkle, with issues of copyright. The publishers of the Groton Herald want to protect the archive and are working with Susanne and outside counsel for the best way to preserve this intellectual property.

Social Media Report & Other News:

- The GPL Instagram account received a new name a few months ago, and with a more logical name and increased postings, the account has more followers than ever.
- We received a lovely letter of thanks for our services from a patron, Theresa Smith. It is a reflection of the dedication and hard work of Vanessa and her great team.

Other Business

- Vanessa took the opportunity to read at the annual Lessons and Carols service at the Groton School. She was in the daunting position of being the reader of the first Lesson and was outstanding, providing community outreach at this popular town event.

Library Director:

- All Staff Workshop coming up on Thu. Dec. 21, which will include a tour of the new Littleton Public Library. GPL will be closed 10-12 that morning.

Review of Action Items from Current Meeting – see above

Review Upcoming Meetings & Events

Adjournment at 8:34 pm – see vote summary.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Zeiler, Secretary pro tem