

**ILSLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, JULY 8, 2019
ILSLEY LIBRARY, MIDDLEBURY**

MINUTES - DRAFT

Board decisions are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

Present:

Board members: Catherine Nichols, President; John Freidin; Faith Gong, Secretary; Amy Mincher, Treasurer; Joe McVeigh

Library Director: Dana Hart

Guest Speaker: Ruth Hagerman, Board President, Pierson Library

Public: Kyle Mitchell, Middlebury Union High School Junior

CALL TO ORDER

See Board Packet for agendas and accompanying documents.

President Catherine Nichols called the meeting to order at 5:03 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

DECISION: The Board approved the minutes of the regular meeting of June 10, 2019.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Kyle Mitchell voiced his opinion that advertising and promoting the library is a great idea. He is attending meetings because he is interested in leadership and how various organizations work.

MCTV REPORT

Joe (MCTV Board liaison) reported that the big MCTV event is this week's Festival on the Green, which MCTV is filming.

FRIENDS' REPORT

Lorrie Muller did not attend, so there was no report from the Friends.

GUEST SPEAKER: RUTH HAGERMAN, BOARD PRESIDENT, PIERSON LIBRARY

Dana Hart introduced Ruth, who was invited primarily to speak regarding the Ilesley Board's consideration of increasing our size from 5 to 7 members, as well as the building renovation/expansion project.

Ruth explained that Shelburne never had a building that was built to contain a library. They had a small building on the Green that had been donated to the town by James Pierson. Around 2000, the town did a massive reorganization and the town offices moved to the old high school, leaving behind what had been the old town offices and police station. The town offered this as free space to the library, and the trustees took it, because it was larger than the space they'd been occupying and they understood the arrangement to be temporary. The children's section was put into the basement, and the adult section was upstairs.

This was not a popular solution with the townspeople. Around 2009, the Board decided it was time to remedy the less-than-ideal situation. The town asked the trustees to decide what they wanted to do. The trustees had meetings, came up with a set of floorplans, and received a cost estimate of \$5 million. The town asked the trustees to fundraise the \$5 million.

The Board hired Christine Graham to do a feasibility study in 2011, which was right on the money: A lot of the potential donors with whom she spoke said they wouldn't donate without evidence of strong support from the town. The Board interpreted this to mean both municipal support and support from the public. (The problem, Ruth said, is that you're usually only speaking to the people who support you, so the key is to increase your supporters.)

"Facebook is a very valuable tool: You need to be on Facebook and use all their marketing 'tricks.'" It's the modern version of a chain letter.

The trustees did not like what Christine Graham told them, because the dollar amount that she thought they could raise seemed too small. In 2011, they put the project on hold.

In 2014, Lara Keenan came on board as Director. Shelburne had a new Town Manager, some new members of the Selectboard, and a Selectboard chair who was a strong library supporter. A steering committee was formed, consisting of the Town Manager, a Selectboard member, the Library Director, and a library trustee. "What has made our project happen was the complete and thorough support of all those people."

The trustees gave the steering committee a lump sum of \$25,000 to do their work.

"If you don't have the full support of the Selectboard and the Town Manager...it's so much more difficult. You're going to need their full support."

The steering committee was tasked with coming up with the best solution.

The architects who'd come up with 4 original plans prepared 3 more plans that would be less expensive. The board ended up feeling that they weren't as comfortable with this group of architects. In the second round of architect interviews, the trustees were looking for a group that would help them navigate the town. VIA bent over backwards to do so.

The steering committee put together a case study that laid out the narrative of the options in 2015. This was later distilled into a brochure. It was a valuable exercise in laying out the problems and possible solutions. It went to the trustees, the Friends, and the committee.

At this same time, Shelburne sued Vermont Railway for building salt sheds in a place they didn't like. It cost a lot of money, and it distracted everyone in town from what the library was doing.

They decided that the best solution was to knock the whole building down and build a new one.

Lara Keenan was very active in the community, and there was argument at the trustee level about how much time the Director was spending on this. They rewrote the Director's job description to include working on the project, and the trustees gave another lump sum to hire a part-time project manager to run the committee, organize the public outreach, do administrative tasks.

In 2016, the trustees paid for a second feasibility study by a local fundraiser (Megan Downey.) She came back with the same report as Christine Graham: Needed evidence of town support, unlikely they could raise more than \$300,000 from the townspeople.

At that point they brought VIA in. Built a model of the plan they liked the most and took it all around town. The steering committee decided to pull in a town hall building renovation into their plans, in order to bring in support for a bond from more people in town – it brought in another special interest group. They tried to integrate the Fire Department, but only got so far as to include them in the redesign of the parking lot. The budget then went up to \$6.5 million. (By the time they got through the whole process, prices went up and tariffs kicked in – they've struggled to keep below \$7 million and had to do unexpected fundraising, plus deal with unexpected petroleum issues.)

The Selectboard chair, who'd been supportive, wasn't supportive of the new budget. The trustees spent a lot more money to send out a poll to every registered voter in Shelburne giving them the choice between \$3 million and \$6 million. 57% said they'd support \$6.5 million, 63% voted for \$3 million (people could choose either or both.) They gambled that the support for \$6.5 million was strong enough that they should go for it.

The Selectboard steering committee member reported this back to the Selectboard, and asked them to consider floating the bond. In May 2017, 4 of 5 Selectboard members voted to do so in a November special election. (When the bond vote came up, exactly 57% voted in favor.)

A small group of private people quietly ran a campaign for the vote. (Trustees, Selectboard members, etc. can only give information, but can't campaign.) Didn't even put signs up until the weekend before the election, because they didn't want to rouse opposition.

In October, right before the bond vote went up, a family in town approached the Town Manager and offered to make a contribution of \$500,000 that they wanted to have matched by a local fundraising campaign, so long as that total of \$1 million would be used to reduce the bond to \$5.5 million. They were hoping this would help pass the bond. The town accepted. Ruth doesn't think it helped at all, but now they were on the hook for raising \$500,000.

"You think you know who your big supporters are, but you actually don't."

The \$6.5 million bond passed in 2017. (After a bond passes, you have 30 days when people can challenge it.) Then they had to establish a fundraising committee. There was not a huge amount of direct trustee involvement in outreach; it was the steering committee (which met weekly for years.) They added a second trustee and two community members to the steering committee. They split out the fundraising/marketing to a different group of people, including the part-time project manager (until they ran out of money to spend on fundraising.) Average gift was \$100, but they raised just over half a million. One trustee turned this into her project; she put in 60-70 hours a week fundraising and working on the project.

They realized that they'd need more money to fund the building, and asked the donor to consider changing the conditions of their donation.

In the end, she's not sure how this affected the tax rate. People will always tell you it's going to cost too much.

Local paper, *The Shelburne News* doesn't write editorials, but is very supportive of the town.

Hired a Clerk of the Works, who makes sure that they get billed correctly.

The Shelburne Library Board is 7 people, but most of the Board didn't do much lifting. The Board members are appointed, and can serve up to 2 consecutive 3-year terms.

Population of Shelburne is about 7,500. The Pierson Library also serves the population of other towns through the Home Card system in Chittenden County. They get a lot of patronage from communities around them, but they were told that it wouldn't work to incorporate surrounding towns in fundraising.

At the time of the bond vote, Shelburne had bought a new fire engine 2 years earlier and had a bunch of little bonds.

If you expand your Board to 7, your quorum jumps up and that causes some problems. It's more a matter of *who* is on the Board, and if you feel that you have gaps in expertise, community representation, interest, it's important to fill those.

AD HOC COMMITTEE UPDATES

Amy Mincher reported on her visit with Dana to the Farmers' Market, and was surprised at the number of people who didn't know about the library and its programs. Conclusion: We really need to do outreach.

John and Dana have met with 2 potential consultants about involving the community in determining the priorities of renovation/expansion. Met with Delia Clark, and then with Lawrence Webster (who'd worked with David Clark on Ilseley strategic plans.) Dana felt that neither seemed either comfortable with or confident that we pursue a long-term "slow democracy" approach. Neither seemed to have done that type of work before, and expressed concerns about effectiveness and feasibility of getting that kind of time commitment from people. Both proposed what we'd already done (although John felt that Delia was more open, but she didn't impress them.)

Next idea: Consider “Option 3,” which was taking a strategic pause and recalibrating in order to get more public opinion.

Amy feels that we’ve taken a pause and are at the point where we have to move forward.

Dana proposed that we might schedule a special meeting. A decision was reached to devote the August 12 meeting to this topic, and invite Barbara.

John’s opinion is that we should drop the project for 3 years unless we take a slow democracy approach.

Catherine and Faith are the new Director Evaluation Committee, have received Dana’s self report, and will continue to work on her evaluation.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Dana reported that on Saturday there was a leak in the main library during the big rain. Water was coming down the wall on which the painting of the newsboy hangs (to the left if you’re facing the circulation desk.) The painting was taken down; the back of the frame got wet but dried quickly. Some of the books were damp and have been salvaged. This has never been an issue before. Dana has contacted M&M Roofing. But also MCTV left a window open, so that may have contributed.

There have been a couple of requests from community members to host a “Drag Queen Story Hour.” Tricia and Dana have been in the planning stages to do one in the fall, but then an article in *Seven Days* reported that a Drag Queen Story Hour at another Vermont library had generated tremendous negative backlash. Joe reported that during his visit to the Greenfield (MA) library, the librarian shared that such a story hour had been very popular but had also generated a lot of controversy and security concerns. Plans for the story hour at Ilsley are going ahead.

John suggested a broader vision, with a variety of representative, diverse community members coming in to do story time. Dana explained that the amount of early literacy training required to do storytime might rule that out. Catherine asked Dana to invite Tricia to the September meeting to discuss with the Board.

ADJOURNMENT

President Catherine Nichols declared the meeting adjourned at 7:06 PM.

NEXT REGULAR MEETING

Monday, August 12, 5:00 PM, Jessica Swift Community Room

Respectfully Submitted,
Faith Gong, Secretary