

Grafton Library Trustees Meeting Minutes

January 20, 2022

Present

Trustees:

George Curran, Karen Johnson, Susan Tresch Fienberg (Alternate sitting in for Andrew Cushing)

Public:

Denise Smith Vogt, Paul Vogt, Cindy Kudlik, Katelyn Coolley

The meeting was called to order at 6:05.

Approval of Minutes

- George noted that the Trustees voted at the Dec 21 meeting to move Trustee meetings from the Town Hall to the Library until further notice. This vote will be added to the Dec 21 minutes.
- George moved to approve the minutes as amended. Susan seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Directors Report

Staffing

- Sandi gave notice that she will no longer be available to staff Wednesday mornings beginning in March, but will be available to cover other shifts as needed.
- Katelyn asked for the Trustees' permission to post the opening for a new part-time library assistant. The Trustees asked that "great people skills" be added to the requirements described in the posting. George moved that Kate post the position as amended. Karen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.
- George recommended that Kate screen applicants. Susan offered to conduct first interviews with Kate at Kate's discretion. The Trustees will meet the finalist before an offer is made.

Programming

- **Book Club** cancelled its December meeting due to Covid concerns, but will be meeting on January 25 to select books for the coming year. Membership is growing!
- Sharon Duffy will be launching a new **Fiber Arts Club** in February. Library staff will use the library listserv, Facebook page, and town website to promote the club and solicit input regarding scheduling preferences among interested folks.
- Sandi and Kate are planning a **monthly outdoor children's program** targeting preschoolers. Each month, they will lead a walk at a local point of interest, discuss

nature topics with the kids, and read a related book from the collection. George raised the question of whether this off-site program raises liability or insurance issues that would need to be addressed. Kate will confer with Sue Smith about this.

- The library will be hosting a **Game Day** at the library on February 19, which will feature new board games that have recently been added to the library's collection. Because patrons will be not be able to socially distance as they play the games, Kate would like to require that masks be worn. George moved that we require masks at this event, Karen seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Utilization

- Utilization data shows no significant change over the previous month, with a total of 120 total visits (95 adult visits, 25 child visits), 80 Overdrive checkouts, and 176 checkouts from the collection.

Strategic Plan Update

Susan presented a lengthy report on progress toward executing implementation tasks scheduled for the last quarter of 2021 and the first month of 2022 (Oct. – Jan.) Future updates, provided on a monthly basis, will be much shorter.

In short, we are on track to complete all scheduled tasks.

Improving Communications

- The Trustees collaborated with FoGL to produce a print newsletter mailed to all Grafton residents in December. Moving forward, we will be producing two print newsletters per year promoting library services and upcoming programs.
- Kate created a library page on new town website, which will be expanded and enriched over time. She is also posting more than twice a month on the library Facebook page and issuing frequent notices via the library listserv, as called for in the Strategic Plan.
- The library has begun providing information regarding town resources and issues via the newsletters and through materials made available at the library. Moving forward, we will aim to create displays at the library that make this information more noticeable.

Tracking and making use of utilization data

- We have refined and improved our process for collecting quantitative utilization data. We'll be adding attendance data from clubs and special events in future reports.
- We are exploring alternatives for tracking the number of unduplicated Grafton residents utilizing library services and/or participating library programs each month. (Currently, we are only tracking the total number of visits.) A couple of alternatives are being explored for tracking this important data point, or at least producing a meaningful estimate that can be used to track progress toward meeting the goal of substantially increasing the number of Grafton residents the library serves.

Identifying and addressing facility issues

- Susan and Kate have begun documenting facility needs associated with each of our current and planned programs & services. This document also identifies existing options along with the pros and cons associated with each.
- Susan has prepared summary of the extensive facility planning work that led to the barn library proposal.
- These documents will be shared and discussed at upcoming Trustee meetings to inform the process of creating short and long-term facility plans.

Optimizing the library's operating hours: see discussion below.

Increasing engagement of volunteers

- We have researched standards, legal constraints, and best practices guiding the use of volunteers in a public library.
- We have drafted our first volunteer job description (for club coordinators), which defines the respective roles of the coordinators and the directors and sets standards for club communications.

Increasing collaboration with nearby libraries and other Grafton organizations.

- Kate is establishing relationships with nearby librarians, but we have not yet identified opportunities for collaboration.
- The library collaborated with the Rec Committee to host "International Observe the Moon Night" at the Snack Shack in October. This was a great success, and we hope to continue working with the Rec Committee in order to coordinate activity and use the Snack Shack as a venue for Library programs.
- Susan is pursuing opportunities for collaboration with the Ladies Benevolent Society and is serving as an informal liaison between LBS and the Library.

Increasing programming for all ages

- The Book Club is on its way to meeting the goal of increasing regular attendance to 10. Three new members have joined over the past two months.
- As noted in the Director's reports, plans are underway to launch the new Fiber Arts Club and monthly outdoor preschool program in February.
- Plans to launch "Storytime Take & Make" at the library were postponed due to Covid concerns.
- The organizational meeting for the new Astronomy Club has been scheduled for March 10.
- "International Observe the Moon Night" was held in October; the good turnout suggests significant local interest in astronomy programming and the value of distributing promotional flyers much more widely than has been done in the past.
- FoGL is pursuing opportunities for hosting Humanities to Go programs in partnership with the library this spring.

Discussion: Optimizing Hours of Operation

The Trustees discussed options for “optimizing hours of operation” as mandated by the strategic plan. This strategic priority is meant to address challenges associated with our limited operating hours at the library (only 12 per week) and the constraints of our library building, whose small size and acoustics make it impossible to offer group activity or even engage in conversation while accommodating patrons seeking a quiet place to read, work, or study. The options that were considered are as follows:

1. *Schedule group programs (e.g. clubs) during non-operating hours at the library or at other locations.*

The Trustees agreed that this should be our default practice at present, though there may be some exceptions for groups that are best held during regular operating hours (e.g. story time for preschoolers).

1. *Designate one or more staffed shifts as “quiet-use only” shifts.*

The Trustees agreed that this approach would not be practical or enforceable, so it was rejected.

2. *Add a quiet-use shift, “staffed” by a volunteer, when patrons could come to the library to work or read quietly but would not be able to check out books or media.*

3. *Add a shift, “staffed” by a volunteer, when patrons would be welcome to gather for socialization, but would not be able to check out books.*

The Trustees agreed that these options are worth further exploration and will revisit the question after we’ve spent time identifying the pro and cons. There was some concern that the budget could not cover the increased operating costs associated with opening the library for an additional shift each week, even if “staffed” by a volunteer.

4. *Change the current operating schedule by moving one of the two Wednesday shifts to another day and time.*

Making this move could make the library accessible to folks who cannot visit the library during one of the current shifts, potentially increasing access and utilization. The Trustees expressed interest in giving this option further consideration, but would first want to investigate how such a change would impact current users. Kate commented that she gets consistent users at each of the current shifts, and Elaina noted that people appreciate the consistency of the library’s current hours. Cindy reminded us that most town committee meetings occur on Tuesday or Thursday evenings, so we’d want to avoid those times if we choose to pilot a change in operating hours.

Kate will ask the regular patrons how they would feel about a change in operating hours – particularly those who come during a shift we’re considering moving. We will also think about other information we should gather before making a decision. The Trustees will revisit this topic at the next meeting.

Other suggestions: 1) Encourage a culture of using quiet voices at the library, perhaps by posting a large attractive sign reminding patrons to speak softly; 2) Provide earplugs!

Budget 2022 – Feedback from the Budget Committee Review

George reported that there is a fundamental disagreement with the Budget Committee about the library budgeting process, specifically regarding the application of gross budgeting as described below.

Before submitting the library's budget for approval, George was informed of a prior agreement stipulating that the words "less gross basis of \$3,000" must be included in the library's proposed budget. He therefore included this language in the library's original budget submission. However, he has since been unable to find any documentation of this agreement and has received guidance from the State that this should not be part of the budgeting process for a public library. He made an appeal to remove this language from the library's budget request, but the Budget Committee did not allow the change. Instead, the \$3,000 will be cut from the approved budget that will appear in the warrant articles. Since the Committee had previously cut approximately \$1,000 from the requested budget, the total reduction from the operating budget submitted to the Budget Committee will be nearly \$4,000, or about 20%.

George recommends that the agreement referenced above be rescinded moving forward so that the tax-based budget approved by the voters will be equal to the amount the library receives from the Town, without the \$3,000 deduction.

To avoid the need to suspend operations when funding runs out in 2022, the Trustees may choose to tap the library's unrestricted trust fund (the Paul Kicza Memorial). We would need to check the intent of this and other funds' donors before tapping any of the trust funds for operating purposes. George pointed out that this is not a sustainable solution beyond 2022.

Financial Report

- Karen distributed the "Budget vs. Actual" report for January through December 2021 showing that the library underspent its tax-based budget by \$1,398, primarily because the library was temporarily understaffed following the resignation of the former director. This result is derived by subtracting the \$3,000 gross-basis amount from the budget.
- To support clearer accounting of the receipt and expenditure of private revenue (not part of the tax-supported operating budget), Kate and Karen have created excellent templates for reporting the Director's and Trustees' account activity, which includes expenditures covered by grants, donations, and trusts. These transactions are not reflected in the current "Budget vs. Actual" statement from the town.
- George moved that the Trustees accept a donation of \$25 in cash and the media donations noted in the Director's report. Karen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.
- George proposed that that all private receipts go through the Trustees' checking account. Appropriate funds will then be distributed appropriately. Susan moved that this clarification of policy be adopted. Karen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Friends Update

- Elaina reported that FoGL is now planning its **Spring Fling Take-Out** fundraiser. Rather than designating proceeds to cover media or other items that are inadequately covered by the operating budget, FoGL will hold the proceeds from this event to support strategic-plan priorities that fall outside the normal operating budget. At its next meeting, FoGL will review the implementation plan to identify the best targets for its support.
- Elaina noted that the NH Charitable Trust recommends that FoGL *not* support library operations, which are the responsibility of the Town.

Review of the Trustee-FoGL MOU

- George noted the need to update the library mission statement in the MOU.
- George also recommended removing the stipulation that FoGL share their monthly financial reports with the Trustees since FoGL is a totally independent organization.
- Elaina pointed out that FoGL is bound by its mission to support the library.

Other Business & Announcements

- The Trustees will review the strategic plan with the Selectboard on Feb 16.
- George proposes recruiting a notetaker and bookkeeper to support the work of the Trustees. These contracted people would be paid a stipend to take minutes at the meetings and maintain the financial records. The bookkeeper would not have access to the accounts, which would remain under the control of the Treasurer. Neither the bookkeeper nor the note-taker would be hired as an employee. The Trustees will make a decision about this proposal at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20

Respectfully submitted by
Susan Tresch Fienberg