

Goodnow Library

Board of Trustees

Minutes

Tuesday, January 19, 2021, 6:30 p.m.

Recording of the proceedings can be found at sudburytv.org

Attendance: Alan Gordon, Lily Gordon, Esmé Green (sec.), Ingrid Mayyasi, Barbara Pryor, Marie Royea, Beth Whitlock (v. ch.)

Call to order and vote to approve minutes of the December 1, 2020 meeting: Ingrid called the meeting to order at 6:34pm. Alan made a motion to accept the minutes; the motion was seconded by Beth. By roll call vote, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Director's Report:

Financial Report: We are currently 50% through the current fiscal year and all lines items are within an acceptable range.

Revolving Fund Approval: The Library has two revolving funds. The Meeting Room Maintenance Fund consists of fees brought in for the use of the Library meeting rooms, and used for maintenance and upkeep of those spaces. For a number of years, the limit has been set at \$10,500 and continues to be an appropriate amount. The Library Services Fund is maintained by the fees received for services such as Passport applications, printing and other Library services. There is approximately \$12,000 in the fund from last year, but since the Library has been closed for nine months, that revenue stream is currently dried up. With that in mind, Esmé suggests that a limit of \$6,000 be set for that fund for FY22, with an eye to increase it in following years when services return to normal. Marie noted a typographical error that will be corrected before submitting. Alan made a motion to approve the recommended spending limits for both funds. It was seconded by Beth. The motion passed unanimously.

FY22 Budget-update: Departments were given instructions after the last meeting and were due before this meeting, so Esmé prepared and submitted it according to instructions and standard protocols. She reviewed the major points with the board. Last year's budget was \$1,244,836; this year it is \$1,275,492. This is a very small increase over last year, in part due to staff turnover, and new employees starting at a lower step. The General Expense line includes a \$500 increase to cover increased cleaning requirements related to COVID. The Automation line includes a \$1,000 increase to cover rising costs. The Books and Materials line increased to match the 15% minimum expenditure requirement set by the state, and the Contracted Services line was raised in anticipation of an increase by the cleaning company, as recommended by the Facilities Director. The one new initiative to the budget is a request to upgrade the Teen Librarian

Finally, there is one new initiative. Esmé recommend reclassifying the Teen Librarian from Grade 6 to Grade 7. The difference is small, only \$1,868 if we change it to a Step 2 in FY22. Additionally, at Step 8 the difference between the two grades is minimal, yet it allows us to signal our value for the position. This may reduce the more than typical turnover usually seen in this position. This would put the Teen Librarian at the same level as the Assistant Children's Librarian.

COVID-19-update: The Library is holding steady with virtual services and contactless pick up, but is also taking advantage of CARES Act funding to winterize some areas, such as adding vinyl awnings on the ramp to protect the materials set outside for pick

up. We would love to be able to allow limited access to the building by the public, but are waiting to for the virus numbers level off or go down first. We continue to work with other town departments and agencies in our planning.

Staff Appreciation-update: Esmé is gathering the pricing information and will present it at the next meeting.

Barton Repair-update: The piece is scheduled to be picked up on 1/21. An insurance claim has been submitted so the costs will be covered for its repair.

Personnel: Esmé announced the retirement of Anna Roughsedge, the Office Supervisor, and all wished her well!

Trustee Report:

Determination of future relationship with the Friends of the Goodnow Library: This weekend, Sunday, the Board received a Memorandum of Understanding prepared by the Friends of the Goodnow Library. Ingrid opened up the discussion to all board members and asked for their input regarding the MOU, and whether it was something they could work with.

Barbara stated that it came across as a list of demands, using ambiguous language that could promote more conflicting opinions between the staff and Friends. The requirements for support and recognition are a burden to staff and unreasonable. It is certainly reasonable to ask the Library staff to put budget requests in writing, but what is excessive is the Friends interpretation of this demand, furthermore, fulfilling excessive expectations is difficult and time consuming. Based on past and current experience, the Friends don't recognize that the staff serves the entire Sudbury community. Based on this, Barbara does not support signing this MOU.

Alan had two reactions to the MOU. The first was that the Friends did not do the one thing that would indicate they are working towards a solution, which is to include the Library director as an ex-officio member of the Friends board. Secondly, he stated he could not sign this MOU and still meet the oath that he swore when he became a Library Trustee because it asks the Trustees to delegate to the Friends most of its policy decisions, and this something he cannot support.

Ingrid added she does not support this MOU for the reasons stated before by Barbara. It is too vague and would only serve to exacerbate the existing problems between the Friends and the Library.

Marie printed both MOUs out and compared them side by side. She concurred with Barbara and Ingrid that the language is very vague. In addition, for 1.5% of the budget, we spend an inordinate amount of time trying to accommodate what is supposed to be a subordinate, supportive role of a group that are supposed to support the Library. The multiple discussions at meetings are disheartening when the Library should be focused on the big picture. The library is not only serving the whole Sudbury community, as well as those from neighboring communities. We can't spend this much time on something that is a very small fraction of our operating expense. She does not support signing this MOU.

Beth said that she never understood why the MOU presented by the Trustees was never considered, and why there was never any reaction to it when it was sent twice.

Lily agreed with the other board members comments, indicating her sadness as a

previous member of the Friends board who has put in years of work on behalf of the Friends, and noted that the relationship was much different then; the Library Trustees were always welcome at their meetings. The relationship has been deteriorating and she doesn't see a way out. The board has tried and tried and spent so many hours, and so she also does not support this MOU.

Ingrid made a motion to reject the MOU sent by the Friends on Sunday, January 17. Marie asked if they were allowing public comment. Ingrid indicated public comment would come at the end of the agenda item. The motion was seconded by Marie. By a roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Next, Ingrid read the following statement into the minutes:

"The relationship between the Friends of the Goodnow Library and the Library has been strained for a very long time, but in the last two years the relationship has deteriorated considerably. The Friends continually show a lack of support to the Library Director, Library staff, the Trustees, and the Goodnow Library Foundation. It has been reported to the Trustees that some members of the Friends' board have made disparaging comments in public about the Director and the Goodnow Library Foundation. The Trustees have tried for the last two years to engage the Friends in order to improve the relationship, but have not been successful.

The latest attempt was on November 23rd. On that day I met with Alice Levine, President of the Friends, Henry Hayes, Town Manager and Dan Carty, Selectman. Unfortunately, the meeting was not successful. Alice and I discussed the Memorandum of Understanding that the Trustees had prepared and that we wanted the Friends to sign. The Trustees view the Memorandum of Understanding as the first step in repairing the relationship with the Friends. Memorandums of Understanding are encouraged by the Ma Board of Library Commissioners and are common. A Memorandum of Understanding details the working relationship between the Library and the Friends.

Alice Levine told me that the Friends would not sign the MOU. She said that the Friends feel that the MOU would create more problems than it would solve. The Friends feel that the MOU is one sided since they did not help draft it and even if the Friends had a say in drafting the MOU, they still may not sign it.

I would like to outline the events of the last two years that have led up to this day.

- *November of 2018 representatives from the Goodnow Library Foundation came to the monthly Trustee meeting to discuss the friction between the Friends and the Foundation and the difficulties the Friends were causing the Foundation in fundraising. There was an incident surrounding the visit of author Lois Lowery resulting in some of the Friends' board members publicly speaking badly about the Foundation.*
- *In April 2019 Esmé Green, the Library director emailed Alice to get the monthly treasurer's report. This has been an ongoing issue as the Friends will not provide her with this information. Previously, the financials were provided by the Friends to the Library director on a monthly basis.*
- *In early June of 2019, Trustees Alan Gordon and Marie Royea met with Alice Levine and Susan Pettit, vice president of the Friends. The Trustees tried to schedule a follow up meeting, but Susan indicated that she didn't see the need for another meeting.*

- In July 2019 then town manager, Melissa Rodrigues emailed Alice Levine to schedule a meeting. Alice indicated that the Friends were too busy to meet.
- In October of 2019 Alan Gordon and Esmé Green met with town counsel to draft a letter to the members of the Friends. This letter was sent to each board member of the Friends by certified mail. And I wanted to read the letter to you dated October 15:

Dear Members of the Board of the Friends of the Goodnow Library:

The Goodnow Library Trustees (“Trustees”) met on October 9, 2019, and voted to send this correspondence to you.

The Trustees are concerned regarding the deterioration of the working relationship between the Friends of the Goodnow Library (“Friends”), Library staff, and the Trustees. As you know, the Trustees and the Library Director, with the support of the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen Liaison to the Library, have made several attempts to schedule meetings with the Directors of the Friends, but these attempts have been rebuffed.

It is the hope of the Trustees that the Friends will agree to expeditiously schedule a meeting of both boards, plus Town representatives to discuss and hopefully resolve the ongoing tensions between the Friends and the Trustees and Library staff. These tensions have adversely impacted the Library and the working environment of its employees. We trust that the Friends share the same goal of improving our working relationship with one another.

If we are unable to resolve the ongoing tensions to our mutual satisfaction, the Trustees may vote to sever the relationship between the Library and the Friends. Of course, we are hopeful that this will not be necessary.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Alan Gordon

Chair, Goodnow Library Board of Trustees

- Alice Levine was invited to the Trustee meeting that month, but declined to attend.
- In March 2020, the Trustees sent the Memorandum of Understanding to the Friends with a deadline of signing by March 13th. This resulted in a meeting of Trustees Alan Gordon and Barbara Pryor with Alice Levine and Jo Travers, another member of the Friends’ Board to discuss differences between the Friends and the Trustees. Len Simon acted as the moderator. Further meetings were to take place, but on March 16th the COVID shutdown began.
- In August 2020 a donation was made to the Library and the donor spoke to Esmé Green about it. Contributions of this type are made to the Friends as the Library has no way to accept the funds, but they are spent at the discretion of the director. Alice Levine felt that the funds should be spent by the Friends and not the Library director. Rather than speak to Esmé or the Trustees about the Friends’ concerns, Alice called the town manager, Henry Hayes to criticize Esmé Green and the handling of this donation. The result of this dispute is that gifts of this type will now be directed to the Goodnow Library Foundation.

- In September 2020 the Library received their yearly budget from the Friends. The amount given was less than had been asked for and included a number of stipulations. In the past there were no stipulations on the money given to the Library staff for programming. Also, in September the Friends decided that they would no longer fund the copiers used by patrons and staff in the Library.
- In October 2020, the Trustees again sent the Memorandum of Understanding for the Friends to sign. The Trustees indicated in the accompanying letter they would continue with mediation once the Memorandum of Understanding had been signed. Alice Levine indicated that the Friends would not sign the MOU.

In the November meeting between myself, Alice, Henry Hayes and Dan Carty, Alice indicated that the main problem between the Friends and the Library is the director, Esmé Green. Alice has a notebook detailing her negative interactions with Esmé. The Friends do not treat the Library director with respect. I have witnessed rude and disrespectful behavior towards Esmé by some of the Friends board members. Esmé Green interacts with not only her staff and patrons of the Library, but also the Trustees, The Goodnow Library Foundation, the Town Manager as well as other town officials and boards. She is also active at the state level. She is the past president of the Ma Library Association and is on the board of the Minuteman Library Network. Esmé doesn't have any difficulties communicating with any of these other groups nor are there any complaints about Esmé by these groups.

The residents of Sudbury are fortunate to have Esmé as the director of the Library. The Library is the envy of many surrounding communities. This is due not only to the director, but the hardworking and creative staff. During COVID, the staff has provided curbside pickup as well as a weekly popup Library in the rear parking lot while the weather permitted. The staff has continued to provide programs remotely. In order to provide craft programs, the staff packages kits for patrons so that they can participate from home. The Friends have had a negative impact on the staff. In FY17 the Friends cut the budget for children's programming and in FY18 the Friends indicated that they did not want funds used for programming in the makerspace as they feel that is the domain of the Goodnow Library Foundation. In FY18 the Library director was no longer able to go to the Friends' meeting and make the budget request for children's programming. Rather the children's librarian was to meet with the president, vice president and treasurer and give a detailed accounting of the programs and cost of these programs that she planned on presenting the next year. This is the new normal and according to the children's librarian it is time consuming and difficult. The staff of the children's room has always given credit to the Friends for the programs they support, but the Friends have become more demanding in this matter. The staff has received email reminders from the Friends if they feel that the staff is not doing enough in this regard. One time an email came because a board member picked up an activity bag and was dismayed to find that there was no mention of the Friends funding. Apparently, the sticker on the bag with this information had fallen off. Here is what the head of the children's department had to say about this.

"Staff has felt personally attacked by these instances and also demoralized. We work very hard to serve the children and families of this community and to know that there is a group of people who outwardly support the Library but are constantly trying to catch us when we forget a detail like a logo or when a sticker falls off a bag, especially during a pandemic when we are working harder than ever before, it is incredibly demoralizing."

Because of the negative impact the Friends have on the Goodnow Library, the Trustees feel that there is no way to continue our relationship with the Friends. The current relationship is hostile, unhealthy and unproductive. I am going to ask for a motion for the Trustees to vote to end their relationship with the Friends. I do this with deep regret and sadness as I was on the Board of the Friends for many years and am the past president of the Friends. There are other Trustees who also served on the board of the Friends. I thank the Friends for their many contributions to the Library and their past support.

Patrons listening to this meeting might be distressed that resources the Friends normally provide to the Library will disappear. However, the Library director has found alternate sources of funding for the 1.5% of the budget that the Friends contribute to the Library.

- *The children and adult programs funded by the Friends will continue with funds from state aid.*
- *The museum passes will be paid for with trust funds the Library has access to.*
- *A staff member is interested in planning the Sunday Afternoons at the Goodnow programs.*
- *The Trustees and Library director hope to find a community group to continue Trivia Night and the yearly book sale."*

Ingrid then invited the other trustees to make any further comments related to this item. Marie reiterated that the amount of time and effort committed to this issue is inordinate to the amount of support received from the Friends. Barbara stated she had given a lot of thought to the matter, but because the Friends did not reach out to the Trustees to communicate with them when there was a disagreement between the Friends and the Library Director this summer (regarding a donation), she believes that the Friends are NOT sincere when they say that they want to work together to improve the relationship. This lack of communication occurred although Alice Levine, President of the Friends, said in an October 2020 letter to the Library Trustees that one of the results of a lengthy, mediated meeting in March 2020 between the Friends and the Library Trustees was that we would try to work together "toward a better understanding," and "engage in productive discussions and do so in the spirit of cooperation." Having been a donor and contributor to the Friends for a long time, it is with great regret that based on the Friends current actions Barbara will vote to sever ties with the Friends. Beth said they she felt deeply saddened about this situation; she has helped at the book sales for many years, but has also heard and witnessed the Friends repeatedly speaking ill of the Trustees and the Library director publicly, while at the same time she sees the Foundation, Trustees and Library staff getting along cooperatively. She does not see the Friends active in a supportive manner.

Ingrid then opened the meeting up to public comment with the guidelines that speakers have their cameras on, and they state their name and address. There will be 10 minutes overall allowed for comment, with three minutes maximum per speaker. No abuse of any kind will be tolerated.

Speaker: Mara Huston, identified herself as chair of the Park and Rec commission. Two things greatly concern her about what is happening here. Park and Rec would love to have a Friends group. It is inconceivable to see ties severed with the Friends. Sees the discussion as one sided and wants to see the Friends get significant time to explain their position. Even though they provide only 1.5% of the operating budget, they are supported by many members of the community and provide services to the

community. There may be ways to replace them, if the Trustees do sever ties, they will highly regret it. Relationships are a two-way street, as is respect. Ms. Huston strongly recommends the Trustees work this out.

Speaker: Alice Levine, President of the Friends of the Library. She stated that she refutes all of Ingrid's statement from start to finish. The Friends submitted the Memorandum of Understanding based on a great deal of research based on other groups, although the Friends still see no reason for one. The trustees are the ones that brought all this up, but we share a common goal and we have to get along. Working cooperatively requires mutual respect and appreciation for everyone's work. So, that is why the Friends submitted the MOU to the Trustees. It has been reviewed by two different attorneys, and reflects how the few Friends groups who have MOUs in Massachusetts, work, and reflects how the Goodnow Friends should work. The Friends have been very open with their books, the Friends have been very generous, and level funded the Library this year, even though they didn't have the income they would normally have, and in fact, there is always money left over every year that is not spent by the Library staff, which is how they have accumulated money, and is how they can support the Library over the next few years when they will have no income. Alice said she recalled the time when they were said to have spoken ill of the Foundation, and it was because they were holding an author event on the day of the book sale, and it created a huge conflict, and how fair is that? She said it goes on like that, and the Trustees "really need to listen." The meeting she has with Ingrid, she said that Ingrid spent one hour telling her she didn't believe a thing Alice said. She stated that Ingrid was not willing to listen or engage. She said she is disturbed by what Ingrid said and denies any of it is the truth.

Speaker: Hank Sorett. He stated he was new the Friends, and that Alice asked him to join the board of couple of weeks ago. He is one of the drafters of the MOU, and his goal was to find a way for the groups to work together. Both the Friends and the Trustees have the same goal, the advancement of the library. There is obviously friction here and the question is, what is the most productive way to solve it? Obviously, it has to start with mutual support and respect. In the old days before zoom it would be to get together and share a meal. At this point there needs to be a neutral mediator in this process, whereby these two groups can sort this out.

Speaker: Susan Pettit. Susan wanted to comment on the donation that was made to the Friends of the Library, through a bequest in a will, last summer. The Friends received a letter from the attorney of the family that made the bequest. It was clear in this letter that the bequest was made to the Friends of the Goodnow Library and not to the Library. This was never a donation to the Library, it was a donation to the Friends. The Friends tried to work this out with Esmé unsuccessfully, therefore the Friends sought the help of the town manager in this situation. This has been totally misrepresented in the way it was handled. Esmé had no say in how the donation was handled as it was written in a will. The check was deposited into the Friends account.

Speaker: Chris Houlihan. Chris said he had two comments. The first is that he respects the idea of a process of reconciliation, but as the Trustee chair outlined, it seems that the process has run its course here, and that this process has taken quite a period of time, the better part of a year, it appears. It doesn't feel like this group is at the beginning of these issues. Secondly, he doesn't believe the Trustees would make this decision lightly without considerable consternation. You have a 501c3 group of people contributing to the Library and the Trustees seem to be at the point of severing that tie. That is a strong indicator about what has been tried and where things are at this point.

Speaker: Alice Levine. Alice wanted to add that she feels very strongly that the Friends

have tried very hard to do everything they were supposed to do, and acted in good faith. There is a big problem. As an independent 501c3 the Friends have a certain amount of independence. There is a symbiotic relationship with the Trustees and the Library. What is good for them is good for us. She feels the Trustees are being shortsighted and have not tried at all, and have bombarded the Friends with a one-sided agreement, did not ask the Friends opinion about anything. One of your board members came to a Friends meeting and ranted. It has not been a pleasant experience. Again, Alice says that she can go down the list and offer and reverse it all. Everyone should look in the mirror. A lot of effort was put into the MOU and the language that was used was used on purpose. It implies flexibility, so that you can move along with the world. What is it the Trustees think they are solving by severing ties with the Friends? And how is this good for the town?

Ingrid read a comment from the chat from Anne Reisenfeld that she agreed with Chris Houlihan's comments, and that Natalie Schlegal did not wish to speak at this time.

With the end of the public comment, Ingrid made a motion to end the relationship with the Friends of the Goodnow Library effective immediately, and asked for a second. Beth seconded the motion. By a roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Ingrid stated that by adopting this motion the following would go into effect:

The Friends may no longer use the name, Friends of the Goodnow Library to raise funds. The Friends should immediately stop any fundraising.

The Friends must make arrangements with the Director to remove any Friends' property from the library within 30 days.

Foundation Report:

1. See attached report for activities
2. Approval of Mark Minassian as board member (vote): Mark has served on the Town's Financial Committee and has many community connections. He has also agreed to serve as Treasurer on the Foundation board, a role that is currently open. Beth made a motion to approve Mark to the Foundation board. It was seconded by Alan. By a roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Old Business: none.

New business: none.

Any other items not known 48 hours in advance of the meeting: none.

Adjournment: Ingrid made a motion to adjourn at 7:46pm.

Next meeting: Tuesday, February 2, 2021 6:30PM