Chesley Memorial Library Board of Trustees Meeting
Date: 8/14/26
Final
In attendance: Betty Smith, Chair; David R Coursin, Secretary; Dana Hochgraf, Treasurer; Pat Savage, Alternate; Donna Bunker, Library Director.
A motion to call the meeting to order carried unanimously at 9:03am

Town Administrator Presentation on the Budget:
Mr. Irvine provided comments about the budgeting process, requesting that we continue to limit discretionary spending and maintain the current hiring freeze. Establishment of salaries is essential to building the next budget, and he noted that a salary study is expected in early September.

He is advising the department heads to build a full budget for the upcoming year using 40-hour/week as the definition of fulltime. The budget must reflect what the town needs to return to solid ground and grow, not a budget based on guesses about what voters might accept. That has not worked for the past eight years, and by now, a majority of voters have the idea that the town can get by with much less than it needs to ensure the most basic services, like timely ambulance response and road maintenance that keeps pace with the essentials.

Minutes

- The corrected minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed and unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report

- A $1,000 check was written to Mae Williams for historic preservation work pursuant to out contract with her.
- Jason has a pending $600 invoice, not yet received, also pursuant to the contract.
- The July report did not include a payment to Mae because she had not yet invoiced that work.
- The second account remains unchanged with no activity to report
- The trustees discussed a TD Bank debit card for Donna.
    - The bank confirmed that the card could be issued in Donna's name without her being a signer on the trustees' account.
    - Trustees discussed and unanimously authorized her to use trustee funds, with receipts retained for documentation.
    - The discussion concluded that with a clear paper trail and receipts, the debit card should not pose a greater audit issue than checks. We can adjust in the future based on feedback from the auditors.

Director's Report

- Shirefest will be held Saturday, August 15, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the Barnstead Library.
- Diane and Sharon will go to Barnstead, while Donna and Ryan would staff Northwood from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM.
- The summer meals program is continuing.
- The summer reading program had 126 participants, about 40 fewer than the prior year, however weekly event participation was as strong or stronger than last year.

- July circulation exceeded July 2025 despite Thursday closures, which the director attributed to strong Wednesday participation.
- The antique toy display from Pam Sanderson remains up through the end of August.
- Fifteen new patrons registered in July.
- The 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten celebration is scheduled for Tuesday, August 25, at 6:00 PM.
- Ten children reached the goal so far, with the possibility of additional finishers before the celebration.

Expenditure Report

- Through the end of July, 44% of the annual budget had been expended.
- The director noted that normally 50% would have been expended by the end of June, so the library remained under budget.
- The trustees discussed the discretionary freeze and hiring freeze as major causes.
- The $23,000 book line had only about $7,000 spent, leaving a large amount unspent.
- Staffing savings were also significant because of Thursday closures and a reduction of one position from 30 hours to 15 hours.
- The group discussed whether to communicate, month by month, how much library funding was effectively being withheld at the town's request.
- The clearest example identified was the book line, because the public can see the absence of new books.
- Trustees emphasized that any public explanation should be framed in terms of community solidarity and "build community" language rather than blame.
- The critical issue for the library is the fact that funds we voluntarily don't spend are then used to fund other departments and the community is not adequately aware of this. The book line is a pivotal example. It's budgeted at $23,000 for the year, with only $7,000 spent to date, leaving $16,000 unspent that effectively reverts to the town under the freeze.
- All the departments are making these sacrifices, as a community effort, so the town can operate.
- The board agreed that this overarching fact provides the best messaging framework. We will continue to explore how to communicate information about visible examples like the fall off in availability of new books. "Like other town departments, we are doing our best to limit spending so the town can function within the current budget. In our case, it means we can't purchase new books as planned."

Trustee business:

Budget

- The trustees discussed the upcoming budget cycle.
- No budget work session date has been set because the town has not yet established the timeline.
- We are currently operating on a budget more fitting for the buying power existing in 2018. That means we are in a hole, trying to meet 2026 costs with 2018 dollars. The goal for next year's budget, per Mr. Irvine, is to reflect the cost of actual current operations in 2027 dollars. The town would be on solid footing then and able to grow from there, rather than always catching up.

- In our case, a full operating budget for 2027 would allow more adequate staffing, Thursday hours, conversion of two part-time positions to full-time, reduced lunch break impact, and exploration of open hours tailored to patron needs.
- The possibilities for program growth increase with stable staffing.
- Historical comparison points, including prior staffing levels, can show the scale of reductions over time.
- Information about the average or median cost to taxpayers based on data about median home appraisal and subsequent taxes would provide data about the low cost to taxpayers of maintaining a library with adequate funding.

Solar Project

- The solar project is moving very slowly despite approval of the RFP by the USDA, because of complications
- The last email update came July 14, when the revised roofing RFP was reportedly sent to other reviewer for final approval and expected response to us.
- No further response had been received.
- Trustees discussed the need to maintain a paper trail by continuing to follow up with email from us on a regular basis seeking updates.
- The project still must be completed by the end of 2027, even though earlier expectations had been much faster.
- The USDA determines the pace, and the trustees will continue to respond as promptly as possible.

Trust Funds

- Donna reported that the Alice Tasker Trust Fund had $2,591.18 available as of June 30.
- After subtracting a previous reimbursement for books of $1,289.98, the remaining balance was $1,301.10.
- Because the default budget and spending restrictions limit book purchases from the library budget, Donna proposed using this trust fund again for new books.
- She noted that Amazon prices change frequently and that the total cannot be fixed until the order was actually placed.
- The trustees discussed further expenditures for books and unanimously agreed that we would continue to spend down the trust funds earmarked for book purchases.
- Donna placed the order during the meeting to confirm the total which was $726.95.
- A motion was made to approve expending $726.95 from the Alice Tasker Trust Fund for books.
- The motion was approved unanimously at 11:01 AM.

Old business:

Bryant Library

- Discussion of Bryant Library focused on the furnace and larger maintenance needs.
- Donna reported that the HVAC company, RC & Sons, serviced the furnace on August 4.
- The found that the heat exchanger had a large crack, the fire brick was falling apart, and the unit's efficiency was likely under 50%.
- The chimney also needs attention sooner rather than later.
- The furnace was described as extremely old and in poor condition, though no fire risk was identified at that time. The frequency of past servicing needs to be reviewed with the Historical Society.

- The trustees discussed that replacement of the furnace would be a town responsibility under the memorandum of understanding, not a library budget expense.
- Donna agreed to ask for an estimate for a replacement furnace so that a concrete number could be presented to the town.

Lift

- The lift woodwork was finally stained and the lift was fully operational.
- Trustees expressed frustration with the company because the work took many months longer than expected and communication had been poor.
- The group discussed the importance of the community knowing the lift was restored, possibly with a photograph of it in use.

Preservation/ Historic Building Assessment Grant

- The Bryant Library historic preservation assessment has been received as a consolidated document bringing together historical information, condition findings, and recommendations.
- Trustees described it as useful but daunting.
- They discussed any current comments and the provider's deadline for submitting comments.
- The consultant was aiming for an August 25 grant committee deadline at the Preservation Alliance.
- Trustees understood that their comments were needed before then so revisions could be made.
- Donna recommended sending the report to Steve and Sandy because they would likely have the best knowledge of the building's maintenance history and could identify factual inaccuracies.
- Donna said she would send the report to Steve and Sandy immediately and request comments back by August 21.
- Trustee comments were also to go to Donna by that date.
- She would then compile comments and send them to May and Beverly by August 24.
- A Zoom review meeting with Beverly, May, Donna, and possibly Jason is scheduled for Friday, August 28, at 10:00 AM, and interested trustees can join.
- Specific edits discussed included changing "Northwood Public Trustee" to "Trustees of the Northwood Libraries" and checking details about furnace service history and the historic registry listing.

Program

- A previously discussed retirement planning seminar did not move forward because the proposer did not respond after being asked whether a trustee could sit in on a presentation elsewhere first.
- Donna also reported that photographer Wayne Merritt would do a September display on hiking the White Mountains.
- This would be a no-cost display for the library.
- He might also speak to the Senior Cafe.

Project List/Building Maintenance

- The project list remained active, with the deck still needing repair.
- Mr. Irvine said he would remind Devin about it.

- Trustees agreed additional items should be added to the list at the next formal review, including repainting parking lot lines, addressing the lawn hole near the entrance, and the side door repair.

Summer Reading Program/Shirefest

- Summer reading participation and Shirefest logistics were reviewed.
- The program had 126 participants.
- Final book totals would be determined after Shire Fest.
- Coverage for the August 15 event was confirmed.

Town Building Maintenance

- The side door is sticking and is out of alignment, with hinges pulling out at the top and middle.
- Trustees discussed that the repair might require longer screws into stronger backing.
- Donna identified Allison Stark as a possible carpenter and said she would contact her about the repair.

New Business

Friends

- Upcoming Friends events were announced:
    - Humor and Harmony: Saturday, September 26, from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM at the Congregational Church.
    - Soups On: Friday, October 16, from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM at the Congregational Church.
- Trustees were invited to help make soups or pies for Soups On and could let Donna know if interested.
- A patron had donated $1,000 previously and then another $500 to the Friends.
- The donor said the money could be used for anything, though new books would be nice if needed.
- Donna said she would relay that preference to the Friends.

Library of Things

- A patron offered a used commercial buffet server/warmer for the Library of Things.
- Trustees declined the offer, referring to past policy discussions arguing that used items should be avoided because their history and documentation are unknown.
- The broader discussion noted that the Library of Things collection was aging naturally under budget constraints and that items were not currently being replaced as they failed.
- The trustees agreed that possible reinvestment in the Library of Things would be discussed if budget limitations changed.

NHLA Dues

- Donna said she had delayed NHLA dues while unsure whether Ryan would be leaving, because membership details are harder to change later.
- Since Ryan was staying, she would proceed with submitting the dues.
- NHLTA dues had already been paid without town objection.

1000 Books Before Kindergarten

- The celebration for children completing the program would be held Tuesday, August 25, at 6:00 PM.
- Trustees were encouraged to attend.

Volunteer

- Donna reported a volunteer inquiry from Kassie, age 22, who was interested in helping keep the library clean and tidy.
- Possible tasks mentioned included vacuuming book carts, dusting shelves, and wiping chairs.
- Under trustee policy, adult volunteers must pay for the $25 background check up front and are reimbursed after fulfilling their volunteer commitment.
- Trustees approved moving forward on that basis.

Other Business

Our Northwood News

- The library and summer meals program were featured in a front-page article in *Our Northwood News*.
- Donna said the article generated positive feedback.
- The piece arose after a local contact saw the library's tech help sign and then also received information about the summer meals program.

Scavenger Hunt

- The scavenger hunt was reported as successful.
- Donna read a positive written comment from Sherry Lopez describing the event as creative and community-building.
- Donna planned to confirm whether Sherry's remarks could be used publicly.
- During discussion of the scavenger hunt period, Donna also reported that a backup power unit had failed during a summer reading event.
- She had purchased a replacement herself for $99.99 and asked whether reimbursement should come from trustees or through the town budget.
- The group agreed it should go through the town budget.
- Ryan's employment plans were also discussed.
- He had previously expected to leave for a full-time Bedford position, but instead accepted a part-time evening remote tech support role and would remain at the library Monday through Wednesday.
- Trustees viewed this as helpful because the hiring freeze would have prevented replacing him if he had left.

Motions and Votes Summary

- Motion to expend $726.95 from the Alice Tasker Trust Fund for books; approved unanimously at 11:01 AM.

Action Items

- Donna to follow up with USDA now and regularly in the future (every two weeks) would continue to track our ongoing efforts to move the project along.
- Donna to send the Bryant preservation report to Steve and Sandy and request comments by August 21.
- Trustees to send any Bryant report comments to Donna by August 21.
- Donna to compile Bryant report comments and send them to Mae and Beverly by August 24.
- Donna to request and distribute the Zoom link for the August 28 preservation review meeting.
- Donna to request a furnace replacement estimate for Bryant Library.
- Donna to contact Allison Stark, contractor, about the side door repair.

- Donna to ask for a photo of a Senior Cafe volunteer using the lift for outreach.
- Donna to relay trustee volunteer interest for Soups On to the Friends.
- Donna to inform prospective volunteer about the background check process as the volunteer's expense.
- Donna to confirm with Sherry Lopez whether her scavenger hunt testimonial may be used publicly.