

Northwood Libraries Board of Trustees Meeting

Date: December 12, 2025

Final Minutes

In attendance: Betty Smith, Chair; David R Coursin, Secretary; Dana Hochgraf, Alternate; Pat Savage, Alternate; Donna Bunker, Library Director. Pat Vaillancourt, Treasurer, was absent with Pat Savage serving as alternate.

A motion to call the meeting to order carried unanimously at 9:09 a.m.

1) Grant Status and Review of Current Challenges with Katrina Kasper

- The director and Ms. Kasper have been working closely to get the grant proposal across the finish line in the face of a many uncertainties. There is no clear category for a project like the non-profit library's as it doesn't fit neatly in the municipal category and is not residential. Federal program staff and IRS resources for resolving issues have been cut. Despite repeated attempts, the director and Ms. Kasper have not been able to get clear answers.
- The questions are too numerous to be summarized here, but the trustees were able to review them at length and are confident that the director and Ms. Kasper are doing all that can be done.

2) Minutes

- The director identified spelling corrections, and the secretary made changes, then submitted final draft during the meeting.
- Minutes were accepted with the agreed corrections.

3) Treasurer's Report

- Treasurer is absent and no report is available.
- Problems with mail delivery of statement continue.
- Trustees can work with current delays.
 - Given the December workload for completing the solar grant, trustees can review delayed reports at January meeting.
 - The annual town audit must be completed early in the new year. In early January, we will get a statement through 12/31/25 directly from the bank so it is available for the treasurer to complete the report needed for the audit.

4) Director's Report

- Attendance & usage:
 - Director reports good statistics showing stable, steady with usage of library services.
- Programs:
 - Senior Café:
 - Regular attendance of 12–17 participants per session.
 - Described as energetic and well-established.
- Gifts & acknowledgments:
 - Donations:
 - From John Collins.

- From Deerfield Library
- Thank-you process:
 - Alternate Pat Savage has agreed to write thank-you notes.
 - Only John Collins requires a trustee note for this cycle.
 - The director has already thanked the Deerfield Library.

5) Trustees' Business

5a) Budget Committee Presentation

- The director was accompanied by the chair of the board, the secretary and treasurer, and both alternates for the meeting.
 - Unfortunately, we learned during the presentation that the committee had not received the packet of preparatory information, so committee members were not familiar with the proposed full-time positions and the overall reasoning behind the proposal.
 - Multiple questions about the roles of the proposed two full time positions vs part time positions. They could best be answered by getting original packet to committee members before the next meeting.
 - The director and secretary assembled the packet, and the chair delivered it at the next meeting.
 - The town administrator and finance officer recommended that the library incorporate its entire budget into the town budget and not use a warrant article. The trustees confirmed their agreement.
 - At the time of the minutes, the Budget Committee had not voted on the library proposal.
- Continued default budget consequences for the library:
 - Operational reality is still anchored around a 2018-era level of funding which was a conservative budget at the time.
 - Chronic under-staffing.
 - Part-time positions without benefits that are not competitive in the marketplace.
 - Reduced open hours and program constraints.
 - The director has little leeway to carve out time for administrative work

5b) Trust Funds

- Only activity has been with the Albert Parsons bequest.
 - Trustees deferred trust fund discussion to a future meeting with the participation of the treasurer.

6) Expenditure Report

- Overall budget status:
 - As of October 31 (reviewing through November meeting):
 - ~78.9% of the budget expended.
 - As of December 11 based on director's spot check:
 - 81.4% expended.
 - This leaves approximately 18–20% unspent with only the final weeks of December remaining.
 - Some late-year contracted service bills (e.g., alarm services) are still expected and will draw from this line.

- Library remains within its 2024 appropriation and is unlikely to overspend.
- Book purchasing has been constrained:
 - Director noted they have again been told to stop buying books at times to stay within a tight default budget.
 - While this helps with budget compliance, it is undesirable for service quality.
- Wage lines:
 - Director and Assistant Librarian wages are expected to exceed their original line items because:
 - Past default budgets under-captured true wage adjustments.
 - We are still operating under those outdated assumptions.
 - Technology Librarian position was not fully staffed all year.
 - Salary savings may offset some of the director/assistant overage.

7) Old Business

7a) Library of Things

- Consortium status:
 - The multi-library Library of Things consortium has been formally dissolved.
 - A dissolution agreement has been signed by all participants.
- Local implications:
 - Chesley Memorial continues to offer its own Library of Things collection.
 - What has ended:
 - Automatic inter-library borrowing of items among member libraries by patrons of those libraries with card.
 - Patrons who want broader access:
 - Can purchase non-resident cards at neighboring libraries (fees vary; Northwood's is ~\$30 per family) and borrow items there as regular cardholders.

7b) Lift

- Installation:
 - New accessibility lift is installed but not yet in service.
- Remaining work:
 - Carpentry:
 - Carpenter is finishing the surrounding structure and trim.
 - Once done, electrical work and final finishes can proceed.
 - Phone line:
 - Director will contact Brian at New England Accessibility to have them install and test the phone connection from inside the lift, as indicated by Breezeline after installation of the line.
 - Lighting and power:
 - Sullivan Electric will:
 - Install any required lighting associated with the lift.
 - Handle remaining electrical tasks once carpentry is finished.
- Regulatory requirements:
 - Department of Labor has introduced a new requirement:

- Library must maintain onsite documentation and maintenance records for the lift.
- Director plans to:
 - Create a “Lift” file/folder containing:
 - Installation documents.
 - Inspection reports.
 - Maintenance logs.
 - Ensure staff know its location and how to update it.

7c) Painting

- Painter:
 - Jeff Markee is contractor
- Schedule for work:
 - Friday, December 19.
 - Sunday, December 21.
- Interaction with carpet cleaning:
 - Carpet cleaning is scheduled for Saturday, December 20.
 - Ideal sequence would have been painting before cleaning; this was not feasible due to earlier shifts for the lift project.
 - Director requested that:
 - Jeff paint carpeted areas on Friday (before cleaning).
 - Leave non-carpeted spaces (teen room, kitchen) for Sunday.

7d) Project List / Building Maintenance

- Ongoing list:
 - Roof replacement.
 - Deck replacement.
 - Other historic building maintenance tasks.
- Link to grant:
 - Some listed items may be funded using the CDS grant if permitted within project scope.
- Safety inspections:
 - No news about scheduling inspections. Town knows about the trustees’ concerns, and we have discussed them with the town administrator.
 - We will continue to document issues and update our project list to keep the town informed as needed.
 - Joint Loss meeting has not yet been scheduled.

8) New Business

8a) Holiday Schedule

- Documents:
 - Reviewed draft of 2026 library holiday schedule (based on recent years).
 - Reviewed town’s official holiday calendar.
- Proposed library closures:
 - Major holidays consistent with town practice.
 - Certain extended closures:
 - Week of July 4 (historical pattern).
 - Week between Christmas and New Year’s

- All staff take vacation time during these two periods to reduce likelihood of short coverage when unexpected events arise.
 - Some closures are designated “not a paid holiday,” clarifying payroll treatment.
- Deliberative session:
 - Town has not set a date yet and it may be on a weeknight during first week of February rather than the first Saturday:
 - Library’s plan:
 - If held on a Saturday:
 - Likely close the library that day so staff and trustees can attend.
 - If on a weekday evening:
 - Likely close early (e.g., at 4 or 5 p.m.).
 - Final decision will be made once the date is known; not formally embedded in the holiday schedule yet.
- Juneteenth:
 - Federal holiday but not a paid town holiday in Northwood.
 - Debate at national level also creates uncertainty.
 - Many NH libraries are split; some close, others stay open.
 - Trustees agreed to treat it as a “not a paid holiday” for now with a plan to revisit if the town’s policy changes.
- Trustees reviewed and unanimously voted to adopt the proposed library holiday schedule.
 - The director will implement this schedule, with later adjustments for Juneteenth and deliberative closure if needed.
 - Director’s Schedule
 - Official schedule: 40 hours/week.
 - Actual workload requires 43 hours physically on site, with additional at-home tasks:
 - Book discussion preparation.
 - Ordering and collection work.
 - Administrative prep.
 - Brings total closer to conservative estimate of 50 hours/week.
 - Director keeps an internal timesheet of in-building hours as advised by the finance office
 - Director has not used two full weeks of vacation.
 - Town policy:
 - Allows up to 100 hours of vacation carryover.
 - Encourages employees to take time off, but operational constraints have prevented this.
 - The trustees signed off on vacation authorization for the director to take scattered single days or short breaks rather than full weeks

8b) Keystone Child, Youth, and Family Services

- Proposal details:
 - A nurse (Leanne) from Keystone Child, Youth, and Family Services contacted the director to propose a weekly or recurring 2-hour drop-in playgroup for children ages 0–6 at the library with activities during Story Time.
- Practical constraints:

- Space:
 - The library has no separate program room.
 - A 2-hour playgroup in the main area would increase noise significantly and disrupt other patrons' use.
- Program integrity:
 - Existing Story Time is a core program with its own rhythm.
 - Adding health-care activities and talks would alter its nature and could crowd out reading/focus time.
- Organizational concerns:
 - Keystone is not known to trustees. Its online presence suggests it is a mental-health/family-services provider, possibly based out of New York.
 - Local presence in NH is not clearly visible on their website.
 - Trustees discussed general caution about external “family” organizations with unclear agendas and concerns about turning library space into a recurring service clinic without a firm grasp of the mission and oversight.
- Conclusion:
 - The trustees approved the director declining the offer because of above concerns.

8c) Technology Librarian Resignation

- The TL submitted a letter indicated her resignation effective December 23.
- She appreciated her welcome and quick integration into library activities with no plans to leave, but she was approached by another company offering:
 - Full-time hours.
 - Benefits.
- Her resignation accents the consequence of poor compensation packages.
 - This is approximately the fifth person in four years in this role (or closely similar technical roles) to resign.
 - Pattern:
 - Candidates are often strong and well-recommended.
 - They depart for full-time + benefits opportunities elsewhere.
 - Work initially planned for this role (e.g., tech programming, junior book club support, possible AI literacy sessions, teen outreach) remains underdeveloped due to turnover.
 - The TL was an excellent candidate with great references and excited to work with us. Her decision exemplifies the issue exactly.
 - The director will post the position early in the new year: Current rate and RFP work is too pressing, and holidays are not good time to recruit.

The meeting adjourned at 11:39a following a motion and unanimous vote.