

# Chelmsford Public Library Trustee Minutes

## January 13, 2021

**Present:** Library Director, Becky Herrmann, David Braslau, Jane Collins, Laura Ecker, Jillian Kenny, Maggie Marshall, Adam Schertzer, Katy Wood Van Dyne

**Also Present:** Phakdey Yous, Jeff Hartman, Library Union Representative, Sara Dempster, Library Union Representative, Maria Palacio, Assistant Director, and Vickie Turcotte, Assistant Director of Support Services

### **I. Meeting called to order by Maggie at 7:01 p.m.**

### **II. Announcements**

A. Katy attended the Winter Backyard Birds Virtual Program and the James Patterson virtual program. She shared positive feedback in regards to the programs she attended.

### **III. Meet Maria Palacio, Assistant Director**

A. Maria introduced herself to the Library Trustees.

1. Maria described herself as an approachable people-person and shared some of her background with the Trustees.

### **IV. Sharing of Public Comments**

A. The two Library Union Representatives Jeff Hartman and Sara Dempster spoke to the Trustees about their concerns with the growing positivity rate of Covid-19 in the Town of Chelmsford and the worsening of the Covid-19 pandemic. They urged the Trustees to consider allowing the Library to return to only providing curbside pick-up services.

1. Jeff Hartman said that Sara and he became the Library Union Representatives over the past summer. They have kept up-to-date on the suggested safety protocols and what the Library has done to keep both employees and patrons safe.
2. Jeff shared that staff has become more concerned about the number of people in the building (200-300 per day), the amount of people not following social distance guidelines in the building, and patrons failing to adhere to mask protocols as the number of Covid-19 cases in the State and the Town has continued to significantly increase.
3. Jeff reported that the Union Representatives drafted a letter in regards to the Staff concerns and gave it to Becky. Becky shared the letter with Paul Cohen, Town Manager and Maggie Marshall, Chair of the Library Trustees. The Library Administration, Town Manager and Chair of the Trustees met to discuss the letter and responded to the union via a memo, disagreeing with employees' wish to roll back to curbside services.

B. Jeff voiced concern that Paul Cohen's initial response to the Union letter suggested that there would be Library employees furloughed if the Library was closed to the public and only provided curbside services.

1. Becky responded that she had another conversation with Paul Cohen about curbside pick-up. She explained to Paul that the Library was not receiving statewide interlibrary loans when we originally offered curbside pick-up only when the Library building was closed to the public but staff were working. The Library is now receiving statewide interlibrary loans, therefore rolling back to curbside pick-up only would be much different this time and much busier. We would need our full complement of staff to make it work successfully. Becky no longer believes that furloughing Library employees would be on the table if we rolled back to only curbside services.

- C. David commented that reducing our services to only curbside pick-up would impact a lot of people since there are around 250-300 people that come into the Library each day. David questioned whether there are things we can do to help with the uncomfortable situations that occur, such as patrons not appropriately wearing their masks or social distancing.
1. Jeff responded that just the volume of people coming in the Library each day is overwhelming for staff. Jeff added that many safety measures have been put in place, but that staff still have to leave the Plexiglas area to help patrons and it is sometimes difficult to remain 6 feet apart when you are trying to help someone.
    - a. Becky worked the Reference Desk recently and agreed that it is difficult to remain socially distant from patrons when they need your help with technology and accessing the Library materials.
  2. Sara commented that the Children's Room Staff struggle with children having a hard time wearing their masks and not social distancing from other people.
- D. Becky said that the Library began the reduction of our capacity limit to 25% per Governor Baker's newly updated protocols on 12/28/2020.
1. Becky added that the reduction of our capacity limit now only allows 25 patrons in the building at once.
  2. Becky was concerned that the Library would have a significant increase in non-residents using our Library, which could cause problems with the reduced capacity limits, since many Libraries in the Consortium are only offering curbside pick-up services, but after looking at statistics, Becky confirmed that the non-Chelmsford residents visiting the Library now are in line with the percentages prior to Covid-19.
  3. Becky said that the only day we had difficulty staying within the 25 patron limit was the Monday after Christmas, when the Library had been closed for 4 days in a row.
    - a. Sara voiced concern that the Children's Room hits their limit of 10 patrons in the room at a time often.
  4. Becky commented that the concern is not the total number of people coming into the Library each day, but rather the positivity rate in the Town of Chelmsford, which Jeff indicated is 8.5%.
    - a. Jeff said that it would be helpful to have a specific plan in place, if the positivity rate in Chelmsford reaches 10%, then the Library will ...
    - b. Laura commented that the original figure that triggered a red community was 5% and that the target keeps moving.
- E. Laura asked what services the 250 people that come to the Library each day are using.
1. Sara replied that the only service we cannot provide using curbside is browsing. Sara added that patrons have access to the Library's laptops while using curbside with a 4 hour time limit.
  2. Becky pointed out that weather is a factor and we have a limited number of computers for use outside the library.
- F. Becky asked the Department Heads and Administration to come up with a plan that would allow each of their employees to have 1 day of work each week as a Work from Home day which would boost staff morale and reduce exposure.
1. Vickie was on vacation this week so she has not put together the plan for the Tech Services Department. Vickie commented that it is difficult for Tech Services staff to work from home because of the type of work they do. Vickie will look into options when she returns to work on Monday.
- G. Adam asked who has the final decision on what the Library does
1. Becky replied that Paul Cohen, Town Manager makes the final decision on the Library's budget and the Board of Library Trustees and the Library Director make the final decision on Library policies. Becky added that any potential grievance would be with the Town if the Trustees decided they wanted to roll back to only curbside.

H. The Public Comments portion of the meeting ended. The Trustees thanked Jeff and Sara for their input. Jeff left the meeting and Sara continued to attend the meeting. The Trustees notified Jeff and Sara that they will discuss their suggestion to roll back to curbside pick-up later in the meeting.

## **V. Approval of the Consent Agenda**

- A. Katy sent the Trustees suggestions from John Sousa, Town Finance Director for the Endowment Northern Bank 24-month CD expiring on 1/23/2021.
1. John Sousa recommended either the 12-month CD at Northern Bank with an interest rate of .45% or the 18-month CD at Northern Bank with an interest rate of .55%. He hopes that within 12-18 months that the economy will improve and interest rates may rise.
  2. David said that it is important to ladder the CD maturity dates so that they expire at different times. This is beneficial because it makes funds available sooner and would lower the penalty for accessing funds early.
  3. David was impressed that John Sousa was able to get interest rates that are better than what is being offered commercially.
  4. David recommended using a 12-month CD at Northern Bank. It would earn a little interest and we can see in a year if the interest rates have improved. We would have two CDs coming up for renewal at the same time if we chose that option.
- B. David motioned and Katy seconded the motion to renew the CD with the 12-month Northern Bank CD for .45% interest. Unanimous approval. Katy will notify John Sousa of the Board's decision.
- C. Laura motioned and David seconded the motion to approve the November 18, 2020 Meeting Minutes as written. Unanimous approval.

## **VI. Team Building Exercise – Postponed until Trustee meeting on February 10, 2021.**

## **VII. Covid-19/ Safety Updates**

- A. Maggie expressed that she heard Jeff and Sara's concerns but continues to feel that Library services should be kept at the current level. She prefers to give each staff 1 day to work from home each week for safety and morale.
- B. Laura commented that the rates are going up and Massachusetts is at severe outbreak status. She does not want to look back and feel responsible for people's lives and them possibly getting sick.
1. Katy commented that she agrees with Laura. Katy is open to rolling back to only curbside if the staff feels more at risk with the Covid-19 numbers increasing.
  2. Phakdey also agreed with Laura and said that rates are continuing to increase consistently and this should be a public health priority.
  3. Jillian also stated that she agreed with Laura's comments.
- C. Jane commented that she had to use the Library for printing since her printer wasn't working. She said that some services are essential for people navigating thru Covid society and computer use.
1. Becky said that we have 15 computers for patrons to use currently but there are fewer laptops for patrons to use for curbside pick-up only.
  2. Sara commented that patrons could opt to use the print from home option if we were doing curbside only and we could bring them their printed documents.
- D. Many of the Trustees commented that it is important to figure out the metrics and timetable so that everyone knows what to expect if we went to curbside after staff had the opportunity to work from home 1 day each week.
- E. Becky commented that we get guidance from the Town's Board of Health. The BOH approves of the Library being open currently because Governor Baker says it is safe for Libraries to be open to the public at 25% capacity.
1. Becky said that Paul Cohen passed along information from the Town BOH indicating that the Covid numbers are declining in Chelmsford and improving. Becky is not sure what the metrics are that the Town is using since other reports have indicated that Chelmsford's Covid numbers continue to increase.

2. In addition, Becky commented that Steve Cerven, Town Safety Specialist, said that within the Chelmsford schools there have been no cases of students or teachers getting Covid from other students. It has been contracted outside of school.
- F. Becky also notified the Trustees that Paul Cohen notified her that the Town is hoping to expedite rollout of Covid-19 vaccines to Town Employees as vaccine supplies allow.
- G. Maria commented that offering curbside services only would not put the Library in line with what the rest of the Town is doing. Maria also said that people need these services and was concerned that there was nowhere else that patrons could access these services.
1. The Trustees discussed other Town Departments and whether they would have as many visitors each day to their offices that the Library consistently has.
- H. Laura voiced concern that the new and more contagious Covid variant is here and has decided not to come into the Library because of the high numbers and concern over staff getting sick.
- I. Adam agreed that with the Covid numbers increasing since Thanksgiving and with the new variant that the Trustees need to weigh the Library's services versus the risks.
1. David commented that it is all very complicated. He said that the numbers being discussed are about the positivity rate which is based on the number of people being tested. The number of people being tested is changing and significantly increased due to the Holidays.
  2. Maggie commented that Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are over and that should help with the numbers and testing occurring.
- J. Maggie commented that we are demoting ourselves by saying we are not essential. Maggie added that she would feel bad rolling back services when other Town departments are not doing that.
- K. Adam questioned whether staff were concerned about working with each other or just about being around patrons.
1. Sara commented that the union representatives conducted an anonymous survey to find out if staff feel unsafe at work and the majority of staff revealed that they did feel unsafe at work.
    - a. Maria asked how many people responded that they did not feel safe at work.
    - b. Sara replied that she would have to check with the field reps to ask if she can share that specific information. This was not a communication intended to be shared with Library Administration.
  2. Sara also commented that there is an employee in her department that took vacation time rather than coming to work when there are more employees working than workstations available.
    - a. Becky was not informed of this situation prior to tonight's meeting and will address it.
- L. Laura motioned and Adam seconded the motion to roll back to curbside as soon as effectively possible. After much discussion, the Trustees voted on this motion. The motion failed with 4 votes opposed to the motion and 3 votes in favor of the motion.
- M. The Trustees discussed the option of allowing each employee to work from home 1 day per week at the discretion of each department head.
- N. Jane motioned and Jill seconded the motion to have the Trustees adopt the Work from Home plan as presented effective immediately. Unanimous approval.
- O. The Trustees decided to meet weekly each Wednesday for the next month at 7:00 p.m. to discuss the current status of Covid in Chelmsford and decide if any changes need to be made at the Library.
- P. Becky will send the Trustees the packet of information from the department heads indicating how each employee would be able to have 1 day each week to work from home and the work plan for each employee once Vickie returns from vacation and is able to complete the plan for her department.

## **VIII. Capital and 2022 Budget Updates**

- A. Jillian attended the Capital Budget meetings.
  1. Jillian said that the Library computer replacement was approved.
  2. Jillian said that the retaining wall was not approved because the Town wants us to wait to have it tied to the sidewalk when sidewalk repairs and the center updates are done.
  3. Jillian added that the Library generator request was approved.
  4. Additionally, Jillian reported that the remaining portion of the Library carpet replacement project was also approved.
  5. Jillian commented that some of the Town vehicle requests were approved which means that we will possibly get an older Town vehicle for the Library to use which will be newer than the truck we currently have.
- B. Becky had a meeting with Paul Cohen and John Sousa in regards to the Library's 2022 budget. The only question they had was about the proposed increase in our electricity budget, which is due to the change in sequencing and programming for our HVAC system to be in compliance with Covid-19 building standards.
- C. Becky also said that everything with the budget is delayed, estimating things are probably around a month behind the typical schedule for budget planning and approval.
- D. The Town meeting will probably be in June, when we expect Covid numbers to be better.

## **IX. Review of liaisons for Friends Meetings**

- A. Laura is scheduled to attend the February Friends Meeting and Katy is scheduled to attend the March Friends Meeting.
- B. Becky will ask Maureen Foley, Friend's President, to add all of the Trustees to her email list so that they receive the zoom link for each meeting.

## **X. Staff Updates**

- A. Sean Smith was hired as the Head of Borrower Services, which is a department head position.
- B. Becky was impressed that within Sean's first week, he completed a very detailed 2-page proposal for Circulation staff for their work from home day including employee strengths and work plans.
- C. Becky met with Maria Palacio and Mike Harradon, Facilities/Technology Manager to discuss the interview process for the full-time lead custodial assistant position. Maria, Mike and Vickie will be conducting phone interviews, to screen people out, beginning tomorrow. The remaining candidates will be offered an opportunity to participate either via a zoom interview or in a socially distanced in-person interview if local.
- D. Becky commented that once we hire the full-time custodian, we will be at a full staff for the first time since last April.

## **XI. Trustee Sign-ups Reminder**

- A. David's term expires this year and he is considering not running for re-election due to concern about safety trying to gather signatures in person during Covid.
  1. The Town will not allow signatures to be gathered in a different format. They asked at the State Level and there is no flexibility with this process.
  2. Phakdey is also considering running for the Board of Library Trustees but has the same concerns as David about signature gathering.
  3. Becky suggested having David and Phakdey work with town employees to gather signatures at both the Chelmsford DPW and at the library.
  4. David and Phakdey will pull their papers while they decide what they feel comfortable doing.

**XII. Sharing of Public Comments (Part 2)**

- A. Sara thanked the Trustees for listening to the union request and for thoroughly discussing the options.
- B. Sara said that having one Work from Home day each week for employees will help boost staff morale.

**XIII. Adjournment**

- A. Katy motioned and the meeting was adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Melissa McCarthy*

Melissa McCarthy