

Pawlet Public Library

Monthly Meeting of Board of Trustees

MINUTES

January 2, 2024

Present: Trustees in attendance: Harley Cudney, Grace Larson, Kathryn Lawrence, Joni Lee, Heather Lund

Community Members: Jed Ruben, Steve Williams, Barbara O'Connor, Aaron Levine, Lyndsi Barnes, Carol Schoenwetter, Susan LaPorte, Cori Rail, Martha Shoenemann, Bob Schoenemann, Hannah Herbert, Lauren Herbert, Molly Beverage, Rhonda Schlanger, Ruth Lampi, Linda Welch, Caren A. Moore, Roscoe T. Stark, Eve Schaub, Martin Kravitt, Adelle Santwire, Gary Kupferer, PEGTV

Call to Order – Harley calls to order at 5:33.

Review of Operating Norms – be polite, listen to one another, no cross talk, comments are addressed to the chair of the Board, respect time limits, have concise agendas, be transparent.

Public Comment:

- Barbara asks, has anything been resolved?
 - Harley replies that there hasn't been anything unresolved.
- Bob Schoenemann – has been a library trustee, feels that the current trustees are doing their job, matters of personnel go to executive session, it's unfortunate that the board can't explain their decision to the public, but he supports the board.
- Aaron Levine states that the board hasn't made reasons public, but should have spoken to Ms. Barnes.
- Sue LaPorte – Why hasn't anyone spoken to Lyndsi and given reason? There has been no reason given, simply loss of confidence, she has lost trust, and has email and video evidence.
- Harley states that the one person who hasn't asked for reasons is Ms. Barnes.
- Ruth Lampi – saw line in agenda re: hiring director, why now? Seems like the wrong time.
 - Harley states that that line will be struck from the agenda.
- Marty Kravitt – re: executive session last meeting – who is the board's counsel, and who will be paying for it? Also, Lyndsi has been attending meetings, doesn't that qualify as participating? The public has a right to know.
 - Harley states that the board's counsel is Gary Kupferer, at this time we are not certain who will be paying.
- Sue LaPorte also wants to know who is paying for counsel.
- Marty asks how long the lawyer has been retained.

- Rhonda Schlanger – given the politicization of libraries (censorship, special interest groups, etc.), it behooves the board to be transparent about where the resources are coming from. Please report back to the community.
- Community member – Who sought out the lawyer? Harley reports that he did, and she says that Harley went into this not knowing who is paying.
- Aaron states that it is important to know who is paying.
 - Harley states that this question will be resolved in the minutes. [Post meeting: Harley asked for recommendations for a lawyer from several people, Gary Kupferer was recommended, and at that time he assumed the library would be paying. -hhc]
- Barbara – is this person (the lawyer) being paid by someone out of state? [Post meeting: no. -hhc]
- Marty – what does Lyndsi's complaint of harassment have to do with this?
 - Harley clarifies that no one on the board had heard of this charge until Lyndsi mentioned it publicly.
- Molly asks when exactly the board heard of this charge?
 - The board clarifies that none of them had heard anything about this charge until Ms. Barnes brought it up publicly at the December board [special] meeting [13 Dec. 2023].
- Jed states that the harassment charges shouldn't have anything to do with the board's decision since no one on the board had heard of it before the December meeting.
- Community member– there should be public comment both at the beginning and end of board meetings. Also, agenda should include discussion of public comment from previous meeting. What is the board going to do about issues brought up in public comment?
 - Harley mentions that the Select Board has decided to limit public comment to the end of the meeting only, having public comment at the beginning of the meeting is meant to respect the time of people who don't need/want to remain for the entire meeting.
- Ms. Barnes states that the library bylaws are quite clear about this, and the board has never followed them. Public comment should be included at the end of the meeting as well. [The template for the agenda does follow the Bylaws' Board Meeting Order of Business in all respects except the 2nd appearance of "Public Comment." Now that meetings are very contentious, both Public Comment periods will be included in future meetings. -hhc]
- Carol Schoenwetter – why the shroud of secrecy, it looks ludicrous.
 - Harley mentions the right of privacy.
- Lauren Herbert – this is sensitive and difficult, protocols are in place for employee relationships, as a small business owner these include written warnings and guidelines for improvement as necessary.
- Ms. Barnes states that she has absolutely no idea why she was dismissed.
 - Harley – have you asked why?
 - Ms. Barnes – no response.
- Aaron states that he was present when Ms. Barnes read her statement to the Select and Library Boards [Ms. Barnes did read statements at both meeting - there was no request to

the Library Board be informed of the reasons for her dismissal in either read statement – hhc]

- Ms. Barnes asks why are we talking about this now, not two months ago?
- Harley reads an excerpt from a letter that Ms. Barnes wrote detailing an employment agreement.
 - It is clarified that this letter was written by Ms. Barnes, and was not about her own employment.
- Rhonda – employers have an ethical and moral responsibility to treat employees with dignity and respect. How is the board going to change moving forward? There needs to be protocols for performance reviews that are standard and followed moving forward.
- Marty – Responsibilities of board vs. Director need to be clear, board shouldn't be accessing personnel files of library employees.
 - Harley clarifies that no personnel files were accessed by the board, only personnel policies.
- Marty continues to state that the minutes of board meetings are a bare minimum of requirements, and not accurate.
 - Harley states that all written comments submitted to the board are included in the addenda to the minutes. If Marty would like to add comments he just needs to submit them.
- Jed states that these comments aren't going anywhere, the board should move on to normal business.
- Steve Williams – why the pay raise then dismissal?
 - Harley states that the pay raise was based on Ms. Barnes' research regarding normal ranges of salary of librarians in the state. It was not performance-based. It was partly credential-based, but based on the normal range of pay as reported by the Vermont Department of Libraries.
- Eve Schaub – has the board been in contact with the town's attorney?
 - Harley – contact and conversation, yes, but she represents the town, not the library. There is other representation for the library.
- Ms. Barnes asks to clarify what the aforementioned letter was and to whom, it was misrepresented as if to her.
 - Harley states that the excerpt was referenced to clarify what "at will" employment is and how the library operates, and as it was written by Ms. Barnes, she is aware of how employment works in Vermont. It is not appropriate to say to whom the letter was written, as that is a personnel issue that is inappropriate to share.
 - Community member states that the board should not use a letter created for a library employee in reference to the director.
 - Harley reiterates that the letter was referenced to clarify that VT (including libraries) is an at will employment state, and that reasons for dismissal are not demanded, nor are they typically given.
 - Aaron states that it was inappropriate to reference this letter, others agree with him. [The excerpt read from a letter written by Ms. Barnes includes the following: "Your employment with Pawlet Library will be on an at-will basis, which means you and the library are free to terminate employment at any time, with or without cause or advance notice." -hhc]

Approval of minutes - Kathryn motions to approve December minutes, Joni seconds.

- Marty reiterates that minutes are threadbare, meet the basic minimum of state requirements, no definition of what is going on, seems like a cover up.

The board approves the December minutes unanimously.

Agenda – Harely requests we remove the search for community staff search, advertising and networking, Joni moves to approve as modified, Heather seconds, all approve.

Secretary's Report – Grace reports that she sent an email to the board and to Ms. Barnes, suggesting a special warned meeting, with public comment, which would then move to executive session, to which Ms. Barnes and her counsel if she so wishes would be invited. The board did not receive a response from Ms. Barnes.

Treasurer's Report – Kathryn reports that 3rd quarter numbers have been sent to the board and will be sent to the town treasurer, basically nothing has changed, 4th quarter numbers are not available yet.

Director's Report (Adelle) –

- has updated room reservation form
- homeschoolers and crafting groups have been requesting to use the space
- GMLC has been renewed, and Adelle has distributed statistics
- Adelle goes over upcoming programs, including holiday craft group, 3rd Saturday matinee, Valentines Day concert, and more.
- The Christmas party had over 60 people
- Goes over the specifics/times of Nina's job
- Hopefully English Language Learners classes and adult painting classes will commence soon
- The library needs a new printer, Celeste has recommended one that will be cost effective. This will fall under library supplies.
- We need to talk about a budget for buying seeds for seed library.

Unfinished business –

- The roof doesn't seem to have leaked during last rain event, we are still waiting to hear back from contractor for repairs.
- Volunteer program – Harley has done it, and will be staffing one evening a week. Others express interest. Adelle is willing to train anyone interested, and points out that it's a great opportunity for high school students to add to their resume.

Aaron points out that the VT department of libraries says it is not best practice for board members to volunteer. [From the Vermont Department of Libraries *A MANUAL FOR VERMONT LIBRARY TRUSTEES*, 6th Edition, October 2014, With Online Updates, p. 13:

In small libraries with limited resources, trustees sometimes serve as volunteers, handling circulation tasks, conducting programs, delivering outreach materials, etc. If you volunteer regularly, it is important to distinguish between your roles as trustee (the librarian's employer) and volunteer (the librarian's employee) – and that's very hard to do. Whenever you, as a trustee, work as a library volunteer, remember that the librarian is your supervisor during that time. Refrain from setting policy or making decisions that should be made by the whole board or by the librarian.

- Harley has sent out a draft of the annual report for the town and, in order for Ms. Barnes to receive credit where credit is due, asks Ms. Barnes if she would like to review and include any of her accomplishments that may have been overlooked. She declines.

New Business –

- Kathryn and Harley will look into getting a new safe for the library.

6:56 Joni motions to go into executive session, Kathryn seconds, all agree.

After a break, 7:06 executive session commences.

8:43pm Grace motions to leave executive session, Joni seconds, all agree.

No decisions were made.

8:45pm Kathryn motions to adjourn, Joni seconds, all agree. Meeting adjourned.

Dated January 6, 2024, Grace Larson, Secretary.