

Pawlet Public Library

Meeting of Board of Trustees

MINUTES

March 12, 2024

Present: Trustees in attendance: Harley Cudney, Grace Larson, Kathryn Lawrence, Joni Lee, Lauren Herbert

Community Members: Sue LaPorte, Lyndsi Barnes, Ruth Lampi, Jessica Van Oort, Barbara O'Connor, Gordon Dossett (from the Manchester Journal), Cori Rail, Joanne Van Meter, Eve Schaub, Rhonda Schlanger, Linda Welch, Josiah Callen, Cana Williams, Monica Kravitt, Martin Kravitt, Jed Ruben, Barbara, Julie Haley, PEGTV

5:30 Call to order

Introductions:

- Welcome to Lauren Herbert as the new board member.

Board Positions:

- Joni motions to reinstate Harley as Chair, Kathryn seconds, all agree. Motion passes.
- Joni motions to reinstate Kathryn as Treasurer, Grace seconds, all agree. Motion passes.
  - Lauren asks if Kathryn is willing to train a new treasurer, as her term ends next year, Kathryn says yes.
- Kathryn motions to reinstate Grace as Secretary, Joni seconds, all agree. Motion passes.
- Harley asks if someone motions to create a Vice Chair for any issues for which he needs to recuse himself.
  - Lauren motions to create the position and nominates Joni.
    - Sue asks if this would constitute a change of the Bylaws, and perhaps Joni should be acting temporary Chair when Harley needs to recuse himself.
    - Motion does not carry.
  - Elliott Freeman - perhaps the Board should have a chairman who is not in legal trouble.
  - Joni agrees to act as Chair when Harley needs to recuse himself.
  - Cori – Can the Board publish agenda/minutes online, we need to make this consistent on Facebook, email list, library website, Front Porch Forum.
- Timing of Board meetings – does 5:30 work for the Board?
  - Meetings will be 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of every month, unless this conflicts with Select Board meetings, in which case it will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of every month.

- Rules of Procedure – Harley will draft one based on the Select Board's rules and present it at the next Library Board meeting.
- Review of Operating Norms – Kathryn reads these.
- Public Comment:
  - Rhonda – presents letter she sent to the Select Board (Please see addenda for a copy of this letter).
  - Ruth – is hiring procedure on the agenda? She finds this problematic as it is indicative of rejection of mediation. A lawsuit isn't going to correct this wrong.
  - Joanne – This library no longer feels welcoming, decisions have been made that are not in the best interest, the library needs to do more to promote literature, needs a professional librarian, and what is the Board going to do moving forward? How will the Board repair damage to the community?
    - Harley states that we will be hiring a new librarian.
    - Joni points out that the story hour and homeschool group are very active and promoting literature.
    - Joanne says the library should do more to publicise this.
  - Sue – the Board began the negative press by firing Lyndsi via email and not announcing it, she wants to know if applicants for the job will be informed of the dismissal and micromanagement.
    - Harley responds that there was no micromanagement.
  - Barbara – firing Lyndsi via email was inappropriate, hiring a new director would be a slap in the face while matters are not resolved.
    - Harley refutes this – there are not unresolved issues.
  - Cana – is shocked and disappointed at the treatment of Lyndsi, the situation is still open, something needs to be said about the reasoning. The Library Director needs to be treated professionally.
    - Harley points out that the public is aware of some things, but assumptions are being made that are not accurate.
  - Lauren – appreciates the support of the community, encourages people to keep participating and voice opinions.
  - Sue – Does the Board feel that this was done appropriately and professionally?
    - No comment
  - Sue asks who is paying for the attorney?
    - Harley answers that it is the Vermont League of Cities and Towns.
    - Sue – this is coming from the Town?
    - Harley – from insurance.
    - Sue – is the attorney getting supplemental money?
      - Harley – no.
    - Cori also wants clarification about who is paying.
    - Jessica clarifies that is insurance through PACIF
- Barbara states that if we are unhappy with the Board we can vote them off, but what can we do in the meantime?

- Cori – what is the board doing to regain public trust?
  - Harley – we are listening to the public and have plans to do trustee training
- Cori – how can we attract a high quality librarian in this situation, why would anyone want to work here?
- Joanne – though there are major issues and it's disturbing, the library is still operating on a day-to-day basis, we need a professional librarian to carry this out, it's going to be hard to find one, there is a shortage of qualified librarians. References VT department of Libraries Job Bank.
- Jed- Why don't you ask Lyndsi why she was fired?
  - Lauren – we don't know if the public has.
- Barbara – who does know why Lyndsi was fired?
  - Harley – The Board and legal counsel.
- Rhonda – feels that there has been a good deal of dismissiveness towards public questions. The Board needs to address the loss of public trust and maybe resign. The veil has been lifted regarding ignoring questions, transparency and accountability.
- Cana – agrees with Rhonda and feels the Board isn't managing expectations of the town members, what is the Board going to do to regain trust, they're not doing their best.
- Joanne – wants to know if all Board members are allowed to speak.
  - Harley – yes.
- Sue – the only thing the town has to go by is someone complaining about firing volunteers.
- Barbara – Lyndsi declined to have a meeting?
  - Harley – yes.
  - Barbara – if someone did something wrong why hasn't it been disclosed?
  - Harley – because this is a personnel matter.
- Linda – points out that Lyndsi fired her, it had nothing to do with the Board.
- Kathryn moves to accept agenda as amended, Joni seconds, all agree. Motion passes.
- Joni moves to move into executive session, Kathryn seconds, all agree.
- 6:43 meeting moves into executive session.
- 7:33 Harley leaves executive session.
- 8:03 Kathryn moves to leave executive session, Joni seconds, all agree. executive session ended.
- Lauren motions authorize the Town of Pawlet Selectboard and the Town's legal counsel to initiate an investigation, and to provide the results to the Trustees for any necessary action, regarding any complaints of Library workplace discriminatory conduct which have been received. Kathryn seconds this motion.
- Joni calls the roll as follows:
  - Grace – Yes
  - Lauren – Yes
  - Kathryn – Yes
  - Joni – Yes
- Motion carries.
- Lauren motions to table approval of minutes until next meeting. Joni seconds, all approve. Motion passes.

- Secretary's report – nothing to report.
- Treasurers' report – nothing new to report.
- There is a \$3,200 invoice from Gary Kupferer, Harley will see if VLCT will pay this.
- Sue asks if library funds (including donations) will pay for legal fees.
  - Harley – funds are meant for library expenses, this is a library expense.
- Director's Report – Adelle goes over the report, including library use, donations, events (including single-time and ongoing), new museum passes, website updates, flyer for this year's book sale, and upcoming events.
- Lightbulbs in the basement and the media room need to be changed.
  - Harley will look into changing lightbulbs.
- Adelle would like to see more volunteers.
- Nina is having difficulty getting February 22 minutes on the website, Harley will look into this.
- Unfinished Business:
- FY 2024-25 budget was sent to the Select Board but not formally approved by the Library Board.
  - Lauren asks about the Book Sales Online item – Harley explains that Linda finds valuable items, sells them online, and gives checks to the library.
    - Lyndsi points out that Linda takes a commission, which the Board didn't know.
    - Lauren asks if we can ask Linda for line item lists of books she sells, and amounts.
  - Cori asks about library assistant in budget.
    - This is Adelle.
  - There is a discussion about bank fees in budget, currently the library does not have its own bank account, so paying bills can be cumbersome and time consuming.
    - Lauren asks if the library can have its own bank account.
    - Jessica clarifies that since the library doesn't have its own tax ID we can't have our own bank account.
  - Grace motions to pass the budget, Joni seconds, all agree. Motion passes.
- Loop System-
  - Harley has been in touch with the Loop System providers/installers, and also with local users of the system, who gave mixed reviews. We will continue to look into this, and Harley will be in touch with the grant distributor to explore options to use the grant in other ways to increase accessibility.
- Annual Book Sale:
  - If we want a food truck we need to get on it.
    - Would this be as well as a bake sale or instead of?
    - Adelle points out that we would need permission from the school. Harley will look into this.
    - Lauren points out that the library sale gets donations for the bake sale, so a food truck might take away from revenue for the library.

- Joni will look into possible food truck availability.
- Board Training –
  - Some people involved in the Middletown Springs and Wells libraries are also interested, Harley will find out availability of VT Department of Libraries and see if we can coordinate. In-person training is preferable.
- Director Hiring –
  - Lauren – It's too early for a job search, we need to clarify job description first.
  - Harley – It's too important for the library to have a director. 4 lawyers have said there is no problem with the dismissal, the harassment charge is unrelated, the library is understaffed, we need to move forward.
  - Lauren – still thinks it's premature, and maybe the library just needs to be open for fewer hours if necessary. Things need to be done clearly and in order. What if there is an unlawful termination accusation?
  - Harley – what if we look for an interim director? Lauren is still not comfortable with this.
  - Harley has asked a couple of local librarians if they would be willing to be on the hiring committee.
  - Joni – we should review job description and policies first.
    - Grace agrees.
  - The Board will table hiring for now.
  - Joni is more open to looking into an interim director.
  - Kathryn reiterates that the library is understaffed and it isn't fair to expect current staff to cover everything.
  - Lauren – in Vermont there are limits to who can run a library (librarian or director).
- Policy review -
  - Lauren would like to be involved in this.
  - There is a discussion of open meeting laws, how much can individual Board members work on this before bringing suggestions to an open meeting?
  - Harley will go over policies, send to the Board, who will then choose which ones they will work on to either create or refine them and bring to open meeting for discussion and approval.
- Public Comment:
- Lyndsi – states that the community and the library are in this position because of the Board's decision. It is their fault that the staff is stressed, and possibly illegal.
- Ruth – applauds the new Board member, and is seeing the Board acting as a community.
- Sue – Reinstate Lyndsi and end all this.
- Jed – encourages the Board to go ahead and put together a committee to hire a new director.
- Harley – if we get the policies in order and finalize a job description we will be better informed and prepared to start the hiring process.
- Cori – operating norms include listening to the community who are encouraging thoughtfulness and no rushing things.

- 9:33 Joni moves to end meeting, Kathryn seconds, all agree. Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting: April 9, 2024, 5:30pm at the Pawlet Library

Dated March 17, 2024, Grace Larson, Secretary

Addenda: Letter from R. Schlangen: (next page)

Rhonda Schlangen  
150 New Street  
West Pawlet, VT 05775

January 29, 2024


To the Pawlet Selectboard and the Pawlet Library Board,

I am writing to express my concern once again about the governance of our community library. Over the past months, I have joined dozens of other community members in raising questions about the transparency and accountability of the library board. The library is a community good. The board has been entrusted by the community to govern it. It must do so within prescribed rules and guidelines. And it must do so in a way that reflects our community's values and ethics. Concerns about the board's capacity to govern were opened by the events surrounding the dismissal of the library director in late 2023. Closer scrutiny of the board's practices has only raised more and broader questions. These questions include:

- **Have all board members been trained in proper rules, guidelines, and procedures, including specific obligations for officers?** This need is also reflected in the 2019-2023 strategic plan (Governance, Item 2: *For organizational stability, Board members avail themselves of board development training and resources offered in person and online by the Vermont Department of Libraries and establish orientation for new board members.*)
- **What measures is the board taking to strengthen its own practices, including training on basic governance and reviewing its procedures in terms of transparency, fair employment practices, and other aspects of ethical and equitable conduct?** This measure would be build on a specific requirement in the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan (Governance, item 3: *comply with best library practices, the Board completes the full roster of recommended policies and annually reviews existing policies.*)
- **What are the board's processes to demonstrate accountability and assess and improve its performance?** This should include 360-degree performance reviews with the library director and the community.

The board's past responses to these and many other questions have been disappointing. I urge the members of the Pawlet Library Board to consider how its ways of working are undermining public trust. I encourage the Board to take action to reflect on and correct its own performance and communicate the measures it is taking to the community.

Sincerely,



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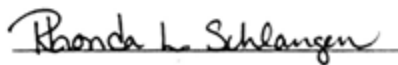
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