

Great Barrington Libraries Board of Trustees

May 17, 2023 5:30 pm

Meeting via Zoom only

I. Call to Order

Present are: Ruby Chang(RC), Lauren Clark(LC), Patrick Hollenbeck(PH), Carol McGlinchey(CM), Sandra Pantorno(SP), Rob Shaeffer(RS).

Official start 5:34pm with call for nomination for office of chair.

Reorganization of the Library Trustee Board

LC request nomination of PH as chair, no one has other nominations. PH accept nomination for chair position after vote performed with show of hands which was unanimous for.

PH which to have nomination for secretary but no nominations. RC suggest checking with town.

PH indicated in our Charter to have a placeholder as the treasurer (which was Samara Klein). RS was nominated by LC and second by RC. RS was voted by show of hands unanimously to be treasurer.

CM questioned whether LC is vice chair. PH indicated there are no vice chair position in the Charter but she is our Elder Statesman since she has been here the longest and is a “honorary Vice chair”

Eileen reminded that officially offices need to be voted by roll call for PH for chair and RS for treasurer.

Roll Call performed with all members saying yes including Sandy, Ruby, Lauren, Rob and Pat.

Approval of minutes from April meeting:

Rob and Sandy cannot vote. RC, LC and PH voted yes.

Pat officially welcomed Rob and Sandra as great additions to the board and thank them for joining. Sandra would like to thank outgoing members and all of members now in serving our community.

Friends Report

Ed Abrahams not present. Samara Klein(SK) Library Director,

Director Report

SK indicated the document was for the 11th and April stats for Libby which is a reading app where you can do ebooks and audio books, magazines are 1841 checkouts as e-resources. Mason library check out include interlibrary loan was 7333 checkouts and number for Ramsdell was 1022. Mason in person visits for the month of April were 5031 and Ramsdell was 332. RC had requested last month to include comparison with previous months and SK started doing them in September of 2022. Some of the cells have little red triangle in the corner indicating months which the front door counter was not working. Ramsdell had a red triangle for October due to high numbers from Halloween celebration at that site.

Operating Budget numbers are for FY 23 which will end at end of June. The numbers are up to the end of April. Can see from the budget the amount spent and amount left over. We are tracking fine, all the different line items. Samara is happy to answer any questions. On the following page is our non-appropriated accounts. The non-expendable ones we don't really look at because we can't really explain them but in the interest are delineated in the next portion. There are also donation accounts and state aid account. This \$34,343.00 does not include the

second allotment of state aid which is about \$8,000.00 that was recently dispersed but is not included in that number in the chart.

Building and Grounds: I am delighted to inform you that Mason's elevator is working again as of 4/25/23. At Ramsdell, there were electrical outlets that were boxes that went above the ground and were a tripping hazard and DPW had an electrician come and now these are either removed or have a plate over them depending where they were so they are no longer tripping hazards On 5/2/23 a ramp kickoff meeting with Joe Aberdale from DPW. Four different people involved in the ramp. Primarily the construction company and also water and landscaping elements. They had their initial meeting to plot out the ramp that is going in this summer.

Programs and events- in April, Vita volunteer income tax assistance program concluded right before the end of the tax season. I heard from Tanya who was the Vita person came to the Mason and quoted we processed 99 returns at Mason Library. This is amazing and we are definitely looking forward to coming back so that was a really successful program. I am so glad that Mason was able to host and provide for all the people. We celebrated Arbor Day with the Tree committee of Great Barrington. They set up outside with information about trees and gave away seedlings and made tree shaped cookies. Laurie from the Children's Dept. and some volunteers had a project of making "exploding seed balls that we toss and flower seeds go everywhere. Nice activity for the library.

In May, we went fine free on 5/1 which is exciting. May is also an amnesty period and possible to extend that beyond. Laurie has had a few programs that are geared towards parents and caregivers with literacy. Friday is fun with words and stories. She is hosting a stuffed animal sleepover where the kids bring their stuffed animals and have pizza and read a bedtime story then tuck the animals in bed where the animals will spend the night. Pictures will be taken of all the antics and shenanigans and fun they have in the library and kids will be able to see what their

favorite stuffs did at the library. May is mental health month. May displays are up including a wonderful display that Fran Hernandez and Juliana, both staff members put together with resources for mental health in the display case. The ReUse, ReFuse and ReCycle display continues to evolve created by Stephanie Blumenthal with new iteration on how best use and reuse items. We will have our first hanging exhibit called Street Zen which is abstract paintings by Ruby Aver.

Staff updates-Dorothy Phillips moved and her position which is fewer hours than our part-timers became vacant. We had staff members who asked to transition to those hours so now that position is open. Recently, we posted internally due to Union requirements then they go external. Our wonderful assistant director, Talia Leodari has accepted a position as curator at the Stockbridge Museum and will be leaving the library on 23rd of June. We are extremely happy for her and so thankful for the tremendous amount that she has done for the Great Barrington libraries over the past 9 years. I would also like to inform you that I handed my resignation as the Director of Great Barrington Libraries. I am not the right fit for this position and I have a lot of responsibilities that I'm not able to manage it all. I'm going to stick around for a little bit while a new director is found.

PH: would you consider one of the lesser positions with less responsibilities? We'd hate to lose you.

Samara: I'd rather not answer that right now, Thanks.

LC: That is a lot of changes in one month.

PH: Covid changed everything. It just doesn't stop at anything.

Ramsdell Building Grant Update

PH: The town signed a letter of intent. There is some meetings next week on the 23rd that I am attending and I think Samara, can you attend one of those as library director?

Samara: I am not able to attend that, no.

PH: I There are three meetings on the 23rd, 24th, and 25th. When are you stepping down as director?

Samara: I spoke with the town and will stay on for some period of time while they look for someone else.

PH: I need to ask this because if the library director doesn't go to this meeting next week then we can't get 4 million dollars.

Samara: I don't think it's an equation of "if the library director doesn't go to the meeting then we don't get four million dollars."

PH: It's mandatory, is the word, that they sent something out this morning—it's mandatory that the library director, because you signed that letter and that someone involved with Finance has to sign it. It is simple as that. It's not negotiable. So please consider that because even though you're leaving, that's going to have a dramatic effect on all of us here.

RC: Can one of us go instead?

PH: No, I'm going anyway and you can go to the meeting, but it is mandatory that it's the library director to actually... let me pull up ...

SP: Do you have the paperwork on that you can send to Samara?

PH: I could send that to you...It's critical that just do me a favor..

SP: Since Rob and I are new, so, how does the process work to get a new director?

PH: The town has to advertise and ask if there's anybody in-house that wants to step up and then has to be put into a public announcement.

SP: What is our role in that? Do we have a role in choosing the director?

PH: Town manager ask for one library trustee to be on that search committee. Margaret, she was a librarian in NY. She is a professional in that field so it wasn't right that I take that role in the search. So I asked her to do it.

RS: Samara not able to attend the meeting, is it possible for someone else to attend?

PH: The people that signed the letter of intent have to be there. That is just their legal requirement but I will send everybody everything. We will see if one of us go. It is on zoom and is introductory meeting about the grant itself and what to expect in the coming year from it. I will send everybody this..

SP: when we talk about programs. How does it work if I want to see more adult program and would like to see more of that. How is programming done?

Samara: Adult programming is done by me. We have had constraints due to HVAC system not working so our community room is not usable. Prior to me Talia did programming and during covid there was a lot of on line things of that nature. There's programming coming up this summer.

SP: I was in Stockbridge library and did a food group. It was great and would be wonderful thing to have here because it doesn't require anything except for space to bring stuff. If there were ideas, how do you get ideas to the people who will take care of the programming?

Samara: I'm the person that (you) would go to, we have a community room in the Mason Library downstairs recently repainted and got new floor. We need a new HVAC system which is promised on 15th of June. We can have programming after that is in.

SP: Is it possible for another librarian to take on the role of programming?

Samara: Young adults fall under the purview of the Children's Dept. and we wear many different hats here...

SP: Sheffield Library has an all-terrain wheelchair and you could rent it out as library of things.. not sure if I or someone in the community could donate something like that? Thoughts on how that would work?

Samara: We have a library of things at the Ramsdell Library where we are getting a ramp and make it very accessible. The primary focus are tools for improvement and craft related projects electronics. The library of things was established through a grant that Talia got and created. We are not 501c3, we can't take things as a tax deduction. People can donate through Friends and earmark for the all terrain. Sheffield got that through a grant so that same grant could be explored. The grant writing is through Talia.

SP: what about Donna, the other assistant director?

Samara: She has a large portfolio of work and grant writing is not part of it.

PH: nothing to prevent some library trustees that have experience with grants... sometimes friends can write grants. Not exclusive to the staff.

RC: There are liability associated with the chairs which need maintenance and upkeep as well as frequent adjustments and liability insurance as well.

CM: Ramsdell building grant, I had abstain because I did not have enough information for informed vote. I am not sure how Samara participated in that and explained whey this grant was not appropriate and would probably get. I would like Samara to review those points and understand what kind of town time and money... that it is a futile process..can you review that? It was written in the minutes and after reading it would have voted no because I trust the town manager and library director have enough knowledge to know what is feasible and

what is not. I do not like to abstain but did not have background knowledge.

Samara: The letter of intent was due last month and with it is supposed to be a long range plan and 30 year financial plan which the GB library does not have an up-to-date long range plan or 30 year financial plan. They gave the date of October 1st for a long -range plan and December 1st for the financial plan. The long range plan involves discussions with the community and patrons and staff with the board and a vision of where, in this case Ramsdell library is going, really a process that needs to be thoughtful and not created just for a due date. I think it's a beneficial process and one that the library should go through but to give it the time and thought that it needs and deserves. Why it is not advantageous, twice before the library have attempted to apply for this grant which comes about every four years without success, specifically for Ramsdell the last two times.

LC: If this was denied twice in 4 years was it because we didn't have the long range plan ? Budgeting?

Samara: They weren't denied but did not make it to the finish line. One was 2010 and one 2017. I don't know the full story. The grant works through the long range plan would be due and the financial plan ... it's a huge grant so a bazillion requirements and things that you go through ... bring you to spring of 2024 and submit it. The town must vote on allocating about \$150,000 in planning and design funding to commit to that. ... Grant comes in and submit for approval in town vote which is not necessarily a given and the grant covers 60% of the minimum amount which is five million so about 2 million dollars would need to be raised which is a hefty sum for taxpayers and if did not come out of tax dollars require a capital campaign that would need professional fundraisers. The grant is also extremely competitive and only 10 libraries in Massachusetts will receive this grant. In 2018, Consultants came, Kimberly Bolin and Associates and they were engaged in creating a program and facility vision for Ramsdell Library. They did numerous

focus groups and meetings with staff and board and people in the community. They concluded their report with what next steps would be and those were to assess and determine the Strategic directions of Ramsdell library and it's services. To meet with library directors and board leaders who have embarked on a successful building project not primarily funded by taxpayers, to develop a financial and finding strategy, to develop a fundraising strategy and establish supporting resources to define project phasing and then begin the MA state construction grant process. So I strongly believe and my colleagues strongly believe that these are steps that we need to go through first. Ideally these steps should commenced in 2018 and we would be here today ready to roll with this grant but they didn't and so thesis are really the steps I think in order to have a chance at this very competitive grant. These steps should be taken first before applying.

CM: Do you feel it's futile at this point to try and apply for the specific grant at this specific time and that the amount of time or money, employee time would not be well spent is sort of the town manager's viewpoint.

Samara: Yes, I can't speak for the time, you know but yes that's the summation of it for sure.

CM: Who would be responsible, the point person who would have... where our tax money, our tax dollars would be going to this employee's time to do this?

Samara: My understanding is that Patrick said that the trustees would do the entire process.

PH: I said I would take the responsibility absolutely, but let me step in here because we're kind of wasting time...

CM: I don't feel this is a waste of time, please let me finish here.

PH: This was signed off already, so the town revised their decision on this thing. Every one of those points was not correct, Ramsdell never applied for this grant in 2010. Mason had gotten the money in 2007 and Ramsdell wasn't even eligible for a five year period so that's the one thing so they couldn't even apply 2016-17. I was involved in that it was not what they were looking for, they went for community preservation act money. Jennifer was the town manager at the time, She said no don't do that, I'll find some money someplace else. It wasn't for this specific grant. Ramsdell never applied. I have the documentation from the State Library Commissioners to mention. I don't want to see a significant amount of taxpayers money go into this. We have Community Preservation act money 2 years ago. We gave a quarter of a million dollars to a for-profit developer that didn't seem to bother anybody. So Ramsdell need this money, we're gonna have to tap some of that fund over a few years. It would take till 2016 before building could occur. So there's several rounds of that money available and what I told the town was that I will personally help start a library foundation which uses no town money. It has no impact on staff... but walk away from four million dollars , we cannot do that's going to be in the backs of taxpayers if you walk away.

CM: I love your passion Patrick, I know how deeply you care about our libraries. What is your hope if you've got the letter of intent in and say you know you're hoping that we would get this grant in the coming cycle. What is your hope for, how you're going to use that around the library?

PH: Libraries have changed significantly, they are more than just books especially after Covid, we need gathering places where people can have meetings with discourse and everything else. Mason is running full stop, there's no more space down there. I sent everybody this report and that's what they basically say. They vision libraries open after hours. They filed for national historic register application, there were dances and

poetry meetings unbelievable vibrant place and that's why we want to be now a place for the community.

CM: Structurally, is it even feasible, if they get a screen to design a space where that could be self inclose and people could use it after hours, with that billing and that plot of land?

PH: yeah, the consultant was very optimistic about Ramsdell... it is a much easier place. It'd be great if we could afford an elevator in the back so ...Hotchkiss library in Sharon, Ct. they are doing that, It's building a little bit different than Ramsdell but kind of the same age. They put this little addition on the back and put an elevator for handicapped accessibility bathrooms and it goes down to a basement meeting space and goes upstairs. It's perfect.

SP: I am extremely supportive of the Ramsdell Housatonic. I think it's a community that needs a library and people and kids to be able to walk to their library. I am fully in support of doing whatever needs to be done to help and get to where it needs to be and should be.

CM: What is the next step?

PH: Once you submitted letter of intent is a two hour meeting next week on three different days. I told the town I would take responsibility for this. There was a webinar on long range planning which will come out in a couple of days as a recording. The strategic plan .. we are out of date last one was 2017-2021 so by 2022 we were supposed to enact another one. Amanda left should have occurred during that time. Something called Library Services technology act with grants worth up to \$20,000, you can apply like every year for various things, we could not apply without that Grant. We have to get a survey out and figure out what our needs are. I've been involved in the last two. I can send you copies. On the committee was Kathy Plungeis, myself and Amanda and Donna. ... Survey on line and hand outs at the desk. It passed and got grant money.

Encourage you to look for the strategic plan one for Williamstown, Milne library. Now with technology, lots of pictures before just text. Any library can find on their website. Greenwich library, I love after Covid, they have a whole program called reconnect....

Talia: It is really important the staff be involved in the strategic plan and long range planning. You're losing a director and an assistant director, where it takes a long time to hire and these things have to be done by October and so you're expecting.. just want you to think about logistics. You're expecting two new senior staff positions to start and plunge into long range planning while they also have a library to run. I just want you to think about the logistics involved.

PH: You have a good point. How the libraries do that is they don't do a long range plan but much shorter might be 6 months might be a year. You explain we are in transition with our senior leadership. It doesn't mean that we have to stop our work because otherwise we can't apply for any grants for another year past this one.

SP: strategic committee how do you get people that are knowledgeable enough to do something like this?

PH: I think if you look at these plans, you'll see it's going to be a lot more user friendly than you think and does have involvement with staff and patrons. Encourage people that don't even go into the libraries because they should be part of the processes. Put an ad in the Berkshire Edge, sign at the Farmer's Market sign on the desk for the libraries. None of this is hard. I have our last two plans which wasn't really much. Libraries now have great ones for the same reason that you attract donors that your planning document to attract donors so if you've got a vision for Ramsdell. Williamstown had a consultant for 2022 to 2026 and click on it will tell you who's involved including several community members, two trustees and director and assistant director of the library with support of consultants. Rob Cullen, the guy that did our stuff in

2018, they did the one for Saratoga Springs NY. It is about embracing the public.

SP: Lets assume we need consultant , how are they going to get paid?

What is the line item in the budget?

HP: we have to figure it out, not easy.

Eileen(raised hand): I don't recall when the library's budge was presented that there was enough money to pay ?

HP: No there's not, The town budget has nothing in it for this next year. But the thing is if we didn't apply for an LSTA grant last October because we didn't have this strategic plan which was \$20,000 and we don't do it this year then it's \$40,000. The thing is at some point we have to as trustees this is our problem. The Long range plan is approved by the trustees. You're the ones that mandate this thing...(the trustees) are given the document and read and vote on it or amend it but the power lies with the trustees.

SP: but where does the money to pay for someone to help us do this? Where does that come from?

RC: answer the money question.. need to look at the webinar from this afternoon and tells you everything. You actually don't need a consultant, so many towns like ours, they don't hire a consultant, they actually show you that there's a book that teach libraries how to do this. Just wait till Monday when the presentation comes out and you'll understand much better what this is all about. They tell you step by step. The presenter is a consultant for the Massachusetts library and very knowledgeable. There are many towns that do this without paying money.

PH: look at other towns such as Scarborough Maine and williamstown.

Ours will be a much shorter one, need strategic plan to do anything. Our last grant was 2012. Watch the webinar at the state level and trustee advisor.

PH: What is going on with the artifact something in the Edge about improperly gave things away?

Samara: we did not improperly give away, we returned/repatriated artifacts of the Stockbridge Mohicans to the Stockbridge Mohicans.

Eileen: The historical commission felt that it should be involved when artifacts are given away not that it should make the decision but it should have some input and ask the selectman about a policy but did not have a policy for selectman to review.

Samara: They are at the satellite office in Williamstown and are working with the Williams College students on taking 3D photographs and creating a panel which the GB library will get a copy and then they will go to Arthur E. Miller Library Museum on the Stockbridge Moncie Reservation in Wisconsin.

Meeting date:

PH: Thursday interfere with Planning board meeting, people have stopped coming to our meeting or want to come and feel like they can't. So could we move it to another night. Monday is selectboard meeting and Tuesday and Wednesday left. Anybody have feelings on this?

Discussion ensue with various members, Wednesday is more open from other town meetings except Housatonic Improvement committee.

CM: have to skip some meetings and Wednesday is better.

RC: I will have to check on my work night.

CM: Will Samara continue to come to the meeting ?

Samara: can attend no classes.

Citizen Speak: Michelle Loubert, not able to attend Thursday night meeting, many conflicts. Sometimes going between two meetings and prefer Wednesday because there are no other meetings.

Michelle Loubert: bring back up on grant issue. Strategic planning and long range planning/ Grant needed which plan?

PH: strategic plan

Michelle: Somerville library, sister library, same architect, absolutely stunning, strategic plan has 12 pages, simple concise, to the point well done. Strategic plan is difficult but manageable. Was letter of intent accepted?

PH: yes

Michelle: letter of intent just to see if it was an option. So the door was still open doesn't mean we're going to apply for the grant. I hear reasons not to apply for it and also hear reasons were not accurate. This is upsetting to her as a taxpayer since information that is open and transparent. At town meeting, \$50,000 was given to bowling alley. Library in Housatonic is pivotal to the Housatonic Community. Grants are part of the job of town manager and assistant Town manager. You don't get to pick and choose. Glad the trustees looking at it. Webinars for the next 3 days, can anyone go to those?

PH: any one can go to it and is recorded.

PH: State is flush with money from covid. The last renovation at Ramsdell was 1930. Last state construction program was 7 years ago. Pretty intense meeting but that's what we got and we'll keep soldiering ahead.

Michelle Loubert: library director and assistant director leaving, it is going to be daunting. Michelle did grant writing for 12 years and degree in education is in grant writing. Anybody can write a grant if you are passionate enough about it. You just fulfill the criteria of the grant

program. She would like to see staff involvement not just the library trustees and we are paying salaries to people and I would expect them to participate in the process. Thank you.

LC: I am still passionate about making this happen. I did not agree with how things went with the school and I would not like to see Ramsdell library boarded up either, so we have our work cut out for us.

PH: I will send you guys some strategic plans that I've kind of accumulated over some time They are kind of fascinating read anyway. Stay tuned because we're kind of in flux. Can meet in 3's if needed and not violate open meeting laws.

Thank you everybody and Samara, Thank you.

Adjournment

*****correction dated 6/20/23; Samara Klein and Donna Brown along with Town Manager, Mark Pruhenski did attend the required webinar for the Construction Grant by MCLA, May 2023.

*****correction dated 7/17/23; Carol McGlinchey was also present for roll call and approval of the April minutes.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruby Chang