

C. H. Booth Library Minutes
Regular Board of Trustees Meeting
September 10, 2013

Present: Dan Cruson, Tom D'Agostino, Carolyn Faxon, Colleen Honan, Bill McCarthy, Mark Principi, Jennifer Reilly, Martha Robilotti, Michelle Rosenthal, Peter Stern, Michael Talluto, John Trentacosta, Shawn Fields and Beryl Harrison.

Absent: Mary Kelley and Moira Rodgers

Meeting called to order at 7:01 pm by Martha Robilotti, President

Consideration of Minutes:

Mark Principi moved to accept the minutes. Dan Cruson seconded, and the motion was unanimously accepted.

Public Participation: Statements were made by the following members of the public:

Anne Rothstein, 78 Taunton Rd, Newtown: regarding qualities of leaders
Liz Arneith, former Board member, Southbury: regarding recent negative reaction from public

Pat Denlinger, former Board member, Southbury: regarding recent changes

Kathy Geckle, former Board member, : regarding questions for the Board

Joanne Zang, former Board member, 2 Camelot Crest, Sandy Hook: regarding previous Board hiring decisions

Dianne Orlando, 7 Lazybrook Rd, Newtown: regarding Director transition time

George Duncan, 86 Nunnawauk Rd, Newtown: regarding employee resignation

Mary Thomas, former Board member, 22 Juniper Rd, Newtown: regarding Labor Day opening

Maureen Rohmer, 27 Main Street, Newtown: regarding Director qualifications

Ted Kreinik, Cadey Lane, Newtown, former Board member: regarding change at the Library

Elise Silkowski, 113 Head of Meadow Rd, Newtown, former employee, : regarding Director and Board

Justin Scott, 40 Parmalee Hill Rd, Newtown: letter read in absentia regarding employee resignation

Written statements, if available, are attached to the minutes.

President's Announcements: Martha Robilotti introduced new Trustee, Michael Talluto.

Mrs. Robilotti announced that a conference for Connecticut Library Boards will be held on October 25th. Board members wishing to attend should contact Mrs. Robilotti for more details.

Mrs. Robilotti encouraged Trustees to assist Fund Raising Chairperson, Carolyn Faxon with identifying potential sponsors for the Turkey Trot.

Treasurer's Report: Bill McCarthy, Treasurer, presented the following documents:

1. Schedule of Revenues and Expenses-Actual vs. Budget FYE 6-30-13 from the draft of audited financial statements. The final audit will be complete soon. Highlights: The book spending has been higher than in previous years; the Library's fundraising is higher than normal due to the Books Heal Hearts donations, a one-time event.
2. Review of Friends of the Library Funding. Highlights: Installment amounts are adjusted for cash-flow reasons.
3. Statement of Income and Expense for the two months ended 8-31-13. This is incomplete.
4. Funds Provided by Friends of the Library Statement of Revenue and Disbursements YTD through 8-31-13.
5. Treasurer Review of Payroll Changes: the changes have been made accurately.

Report of the Library Director: The Director's report was sent by email.

Shawn Fields, Library Director reported that he implementing a schedule for strategic planning which has begun by hosting three public forums. Comments from those forums were emailed to the Board. Mr. Fields requests that the Board form a Vision Planning Committee.

Committee Reports:

Policies and Personnel: No report.

Fund Raising: Carolyn Faxon discussed details for the Turkey Trot including t-shirts and sponsorship. Trustees are encouraged to donate to the Turkey Trot. We have been challenged, as a Board to achieve Gold Level Sponsorship. Checks can be made to "Newtown Turkey Trot" .

Building, Grounds, and Interior: Tom D'Agostino reported on the cooling and heating systems and the potential costs of having the leaking pumps repaired or replaced. He states that replacement, though more expensive, would be preferable over the long term.

Mr. D'Agostino mentioned Roots to Shoots, a company that is doing some weeding and trimming on the grounds. They will look at the trees, some of which are in a weakened state.

Long Range Planning: No report.

Friends of the Library Liaison: Pete Stern reported on the success of the book sale and mentioned that they continue to seek books. A book drive is planned in October.

Art Liaison: No report.

Historical Liaison: Dan Cruson reported that there will be a display of penny banks at the Library. He brought one example, possibly from the 40s or 50s, from Newtown Savings Bank.

Nominating Committee: No report.

Old Business: None.

New Business: Director Shawn Fields mentioned that a statue that was donated some time ago will be placed in the Rose Garden. A committee to review gifts has been formed that includes Mary Thomas, Trustee Emeritus, and Michelle Rosenthal.

A motion to accept the statue (in the event that its unknown value exceeds \$500) was made by Bill McCarthy. Michelle Rosenthal seconded, and the motion passed.

Mr. Fields mentioned that a Documentary Filmmaker was planning to come to the Library to take video of the digitization process of 12/14 memorabilia. The presumed prior approval for this documentary was of uncertain origin. No Board action was taken due to lack of complete information.

A request was made by Iron Mountain, the company that has provided a generous grant for storage of 12/14 memorabilia, to film the digitization process for the purposes of motivating and/or instructing staff.

Dan Cruson moved to allow Iron Mountain to film; Bill McCarthy seconded. The motion passed with a request for a Library copy and a letter from the company stating that the video would not be used for sales purposes.

Mr. Fields stated that an organization, Autism Speaks, would like to donate materials and resources regarding autism. He will forward more information to the Board for consideration at the October meeting.

Local business owners who do not live in Newtown have requested Newtown library cards to be able to access Newtown databases.

Bill McCarthy moved to allow local business owners to get Newtown Library Cards. Pete Stern seconded, and the motion passed.

Mr. Fields noted that the Library Staff feels disconnected from the Board and suggested the Board consider hosting a holiday party for the staff.

During the Labor Day Parade there was a question of usage of the land in front of the Library. Two different groups wanted to set up operations in the area.

There is a suggestion that during the holiday festival period decorations might be used in one of the historical rooms.

A motion to enter executive session was made by Michelle Rosenthal. Bill McCarthy seconded. Motion passed. Executive Session commenced at 8:09.

Executive Session ended at 9:47 pm.

Move to adjourn by Pete Stern seconded by Michelle Rosenthal. Approval was unanimous.

Meeting adjourned at 9:48 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Reilly
Secretary
CH Booth Library Board of Trustees

Date: September 9, 2013
From: Nicole Morris
To: Martha Robilotti and Board Members
Ref: Concerns about changes at the Library

Dear Mrs Robilotti and Board Members,

As you have heard from the public, many people have voiced their dissatisfaction and concerns about the new Library Director, Mr. Shawn Fields.

We, who are patrons and members of this wonderful Library, are shocked by the unfortunate changes that have taken place and others that are planned for the near future, notably, moving the computers downstairs and leaving the Reference room on the third floor without competent staff to help the public. If anything the Reference section should be expanded, fully staffed and the computers left exactly where they are.

Since Mr. Fields does not seem to understand how this Library functions, I want to know how many Board Members were present when he was interviewed for the position and what were the criteria used in the hiring process? . Did they use due-diligence in researching Mr. Fields' qualifications? Did they visit the Library where he worked previously? What was the impression of him from the Staff there?

What are the marching orders given Mr. Fields from the Board?

Perhaps, the Board Members were too hasty in their decision to hire Mr. Fields and should take another look at how well positioned Mr. Fields is for this job.

I would like my remarks and concerns to be included in the minutes. Thank you for your consideration

Nicole Morris



The Booth Library has always been first rate with a staff par excellence. However, recently I've heard of the resignation of Andrea Zimmerman. I've known Andrea for over eight years. I worked with her on a project for the Newtown Historical Society and know her to be a very talented addition to the library. I also know Andrea to be a person of only the highest integrity who puts what's best for the library in the highest regard. I know that the reason Andrea left is because her integrity wouldn't allow her to continue to participate in something that didn't meet that high standard. It is true the library is a business, however when business becomes the priority over the way people are treated, then that represents a tragic shift. I implore the heads of this library to reconsider the choice of the director and to reach back out to Andrea so she can become a part of this Library again where she is very much missed.

Regards,

George Duncan

g.duncanphoto@gmail.com

917 327 - 7997

I am a concerned citizen, patron and former employee wondering about the future of the Cyrenius Booth Library. I am concerned that the Board has hired a new Director who is not attuned to the needs of the community, someone who has no idea of the role the library plays here in town, particularly in a town that has been dealt a major blow in the past year.

An old adage suggests that when one moves into a new house, one should live there a while before making changes. Clearly, Director Shawn Fields is not taking the time to get to know the community or his staff. I understand the need to standardize many job related processes and procedures, but I think he would have been better off making the necessary legal changes to bring the library up to speed while taking a little more time with other decisions. What I see is a library filled with tension, where no one knows what is going on from one day to the next. Decisions are made and rescinded and poorly thought out plans are put in place with no idea or concern for their impact.

Thanks to Mr. Fields, you opened the library on Labor Day, forcing people to work on the one major holiday in town, and then you basically hosted a nice big indoor restroom facility for parade goers. This was not good use of taxpayer money in my mind. If the library wants to be part of the action, bring in some volunteers to hand out lemonade or balloons or hold a mini-book sale on the library lawn.

I think the Board and the Director need to be grateful for the great staff they have. These are people who always go the extra mile even though they aren't well paid by society's standards. The library provides service to the community. You can't provide good service without good staff. Booth Library staff has historically been grateful to have jobs that allow some flexibility in scheduling to accommodate the staff member's personal needs. There is also a history of using staff talents and gifts to benefit both the library and patrons. I have always been appalled at the callous treatment and attitude displayed by the Board, and now the new Director in a town where librarians have strong ties to patrons and where service is very important to staff. There seems to be an attitude of take it or leave and I am disgusted by this.

I have always felt the disrespect of the Board when we are summoned to a "thank you" event, on our own time, or, we are told that we need to solicit donations from patrons ourselves. I feel the Board is very disconnected from the needs of the community and from the library itself. I worked in the library for 6 years and I don't think I ever met a Board member who greeted me and introduced him or herself as such. If I know any, I'm not aware of it.

Does the library need a plan to carry it forward? Yes. Does the library need a Board and Director who understand the importance and role of this institution to patrons? Yes. Does the library need to use social and other media to help further the goals of the institution? Yes. This is certainly not what I am seeing. Please put a stop to these sudden, poorly planned changes. I've never understood why the Board seemed so divorced from the Library. It's a shame really. They missed out on a great place.

Sincerely,



Elise Silkowski

Newtown Resident, Patron and former Booth Library Clerk

From: "Justin Scott" <benabbott@aol.com>
To: dcruson@charter.net
Date: 09/10/2013 12:45:56 EDT
Subject: **Statement to the Board**

Dear Dan,

Thank you so much for reading this at the Library Board Meeting.

Best,
Justin

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Of the changes the new library director has instituted, one is especially catastrophic and should be reversed immediately.

Driving Andrea Zimmerman out of the library was worse than a cruel attack on a beloved member of the institution. For as hurtful as it must be for her, it is a terrible loss for Newtown. The patrons of the library have lost a dedicated public servant, a person who made a difference in the life of every reader, writer, school child, and student who turned to her for help. Such employees must be cherished.

It seems to me the board has two choices: Reinstate Andrea Zimmerman and demand the full support for her from the new director; or replace the new director.

By admitting a mistake, Shawn Fields can repair the damage he has wreaked so far, and start over— forgiven by a forgiving town—at an important job that cries to be done with flair, intelligence, dedication, and kindness. If he cannot accept Andrea Zimmerman back wholeheartedly, than the Board has to admit a mistake and find a new director.

Justin Scott

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September 9, 2013

The Board of Trustees

Cyrenius Booth Library

25 Main Street

Newtown, Connecticut 06470

Dear Members of the Board:

As a member of the Board of Trustees for 20 years, I was in the position to review the Personnel Policies Manual of the C.H. Booth Library and make adjustments on drafts as they were circulated to the Board. I am very concerned about the apparent change in the list of Holidays as stated in the manual.

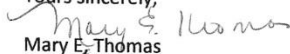
To my surprise, a notice was placed in the August 30 issue of The Newtown Bee stating, "Booth Library Open On Labor Day." This was wholly unanticipated since the front page of the same issue stated that "Affected Road sections will be closed to through traffic from about 9:40 a.m. to about 1:15 p.m."

I have 3 issues with this development:

1. It would appear to be a violation of library policy to open the library to the public on a scheduled holiday. By doing this, the staff is put in the position to either agree to the opening, or disagree, and perhaps put their position in jeopardy if they choose not to work that day.
2. How is the public supposed to access the library if the road is closed? What is the point of opening this large building to the public if they cannot get through the parade area to enter? I myself tried to get to the back parking area after the parade was over and saw parade-goers still in chairs across the driveway. How is that safe for either pedestrian, driver, or parade observer?
3. Has a precedent now been set that the schedule of holidays can be altered at will? Will employees be told to alter their plans and show up for work on Columbus Day, Veteran's Day, or New Year's day, just to name a few?

I think this is an experience, which in my teaching days would have been established as a "past practice," that should be reviewed at length by the full Board.

Yours sincerely,



Mary E. Thomas

Trustee Emeritus

P.S.

I also must question the timing of the three Vision Quest meetings opened to the public in late August. I attended all 3 meetings. They were the most contentious and difficult public discussions I have ever witnessed in this town. Perhaps if they had been held at a more appropriate time, they would have been more positive and productive.

As one of the parents noted at the second meeting, the final meeting was going to be held on the evening of the first day of school. She said "What parent is going to leave their children on the first day back to school for a library meeting?"

I have to agree with her. I also noticed very few Board members present at the meetings, most likely because they too, may well have had vacation plans or family reunions which prevented them from attending.

I think the Board needs to become much more involved in the operations of the library. A history of the library staff shows that we have had only two long-term library directors in the past forty years. To appear to rush not only the selection of a new director, but also several drastic changes, makes the transition from a stable library environment into a chaotic one a real problem. We all deserve more.


Mary Thomas

Testimony to the Library Board
Anne Rothstein, Ed.D.
Professor, School/College Collaborative Founding Director
Grants Specialist
78 Taunton Lake Road
Newtown Resident since 1976

In the 37 years I have lived in Newtown I have made good use of the Cyrenius Booth Library and have always been appreciative of the assistance and support of the staff. I have also been a loyal contributor to the Friends of the Library and have increased my support over the years in honor of the support and pleasure the library has afforded me.

For all that time I have been commuting by car to my position at Lehman College, located in the Bronx. For much of that time the library was my source of books on tape and then books on CD. Once I exhausted their titles and began to purchase my own I would read them and then donate them for the book sale or for use by others if the staff choose to put them in the collection. I have also used the third floor of the library for research, study and writing and have found the third floor to be ideal for concentration, thinking, editing and revising.

I have been at Lehman College in a variety of positions over the past 50 years as Department Chair, Associate Dean and Associate Provost. As a result I have long experience in working with Deans, Department Chairs, Provosts and Vice Presidents as they transitioned into and out of the college. I have come to realize that each person can contribute something of value to the organization. However, there are some ground rules that are associated with those executives who have made the greatest contribution to the growth and development of our college. These rules are not limited to colleges and universities but apply generally to organizations that are public-serving. The Cyrenius Booth Library is no exception.

Those executives who have made and have the potential to make the greatest contributions:

1. Learn about the organizations they join before making changes; especially those which impact on the personnel and operations.
2. Meet with all departments and staff in the organization (or department heads) to acquire needed information about the organization and the individuals.
3. Avoid the urge to institute change to show that you are taking charge and to reshape the organization to your thoughts and ideals.
4. Engage the employees and find out what works and what needs work.
5. Identify who the leaders are among the staff and work with them as a team.
6. When creating a vision, mission and/or a strategic plan for the organization engage those who will be implementing the plan.
7. Do not assume they are experts on all the issues that have to be dealt with but show that you seek experts to conduct trainings and professional development.

Those deans, provosts, vice presidents and directors who did not acknowledge these rules did not have long tenure at my college and made themselves and those around them very unhappy; those that did acknowledge these rules by respecting their staff and by earning their respect before making change were able to move the college/department/office ahead and were leaders of their faculty and staff.

My name is Kathy Geckle. I was on this board for 16 years and many of the current board are my friends, and I love the staff and I love this library and all it represents.

I was on the steering committee for the library addition/renovation for several years. I poured my heart into this facility. To hear that "A third floor is unsustainable" is outrageous! I contacted this building's architect. He stated that based on our population, circulation, patrons, and site, that the CH Booth Library clearly required a third floor. There are also three new libraries in CT with third floors for the same reasons. All on one floor or two floors is achieved only when the site is large enough.

I have several questions for this meeting:

1. What was the process of selecting a new director?
2. How thorough was the background check?
3. It appears that the Board actually wanted a business manager. In that case, why was the Board position of VP of Finance eliminated when that individual could oversee the director. (My opinion is that the Board's actions are a push-back because of the previous director. The board never took responsibility. This was my primary reason for resigning.)
4. What was the vote on the new director?
5. Why was the president of the Friends (a very good person) on the search committee and NOT a single member of the library staff was invited?
6. Who is giving the director a green light on immediate changes (staff positions and possible department locations)
7. Who is allowing the director to require female staff members to meet primarily in his office with the door closed and the door locks.
8. Did the Board consult with the staff regarding their initial reaction to the director?
9. Does the Board believe the new director is actually certified to give the staff security training?
10. Is the Board aware of the conspicuous amount of the Director's blogs and the amount of time involved? Is this purely a Public Relations maneuver?
11. Is the board concerned about Library Donors' reactions to the negative reception of the new director?
12. Who approved opening of the Library on Labor Day, a National Holiday? My understanding is that this had to be a Board vote.
13. Does the board understand the term 'Business Strategy'? Strategic planning does not include announcing major changes six weeks into a new job, and then holding "Focus Groups". That's backwards.
14. Is the Director still conducting a consulting business?

The above are my opinions .Here is my advice: Everyone , including myself, makes bad decisions in their life. The hiring of Shawn Fields was a bad decision. He is not, nor will he ever be a good fit due to a lack of

interpersonal skills.(I believe he would be far better off in a corporate library position).

The Board should move on. My suggestion: request that the Asst Library Director, Beryl Harrison, take over again as acting director for an interim period of about a year. I have spoken with Beryl and she agreed to serve again if asked. When Beryl was initially considered for the position of permanent Director she declined because she felt it would be unfair to the staff since she planned to retire in a year or two. This time around, the plan would allow for a calming respite for the town, the patrons and the dedicated staff. Under the supervision of Beryl Harrison, this library functioned

amazingly under the worst possible set of circumstances. The former director was on site but not in charge, the town was in trauma and yet the library was a place of recovery. From therapy dogs, grief counselors, network interviewers, authors etc. the library ran smoothly because the staff were caring, energetic and sympathetic- even when they were exhausted.

At a selected time with Beryl running the library, a brand new search committee could be assembled keeping in mind what this library really needs.

It might be helpful if you are more inclusive in your next search, similar to what the Newtown Board of Education is doing for their current search for a new Superintendent of Schools. This info is in the Bee.

Please remember that the goal of this library is and should always be "Public Service".

Kathy Geckle
September 10, 2013

Letter submitted to Library Board of Trustees Secretary for inclusion in the Board Meeting Minutes.