

Pawlet Public Library
Meeting of Board of Trustees

MINUTES

January 14, 2025

Present: Trustees in attendance: Lauren Herbert, Grace Larson, Joni Lee, Cori Rail, Sue LaPorte

Members of the public present:

Nina Dubois, Adelle Santwire, Linda Lynton, Annie Nash, Fred Stone, Shannon Sizia, Nori Hayes, Hillary Doran, Richard Kniffin, Hannah Herbert, Robert Herbert, Joe Schoenemann, Martha Schoenemann, Gordon Dossett, William with PEGTV

5:31 Call to order

- Lauren motions to find that premature general public knowledge of privileged attorney-client communications and discussion of probable litigation would clearly place the Library Board of Trustees at a substantial disadvantage, including by revealing privileged information and possibly risking waiver of attorney-client privilege. Sue seconds, no discussion, motion carries.
- Lauren moves to enter executive session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(E) and (F) for discussion of probable litigation and confidential attorney-client communications and to invite legal counsel to attend. Sue seconds, no discussion, motion carries.
- 5:33 enter executive session.
- 6:28 leave executive session.
- 6:31 meeting called back to order.
- Cori reads Operating Norms.
- Agenda:
 - o Cori motions to add discussion of board training at Manchester public library, Lauren seconds, motion carries.
- Public comment:
 - o Hilary would like to thank Nina and Adelle for all their hard work and welcoming.
 - o Annie – introduces herself, she is running for an open board position in March.
- Secretary's report:
 - o Joni motions to approve minutes from December 17th meeting, Lauren seconds, no discussion, motion carries.
 - o Sue motions to approve annual letter submitted by Grace and Lauren, Joni seconds, discussion motion carries.
- Treasurer's report:
 - o Sue motions to approve the warrant, Grace seconds, discussion, motion carries.
 - o Kathryn has cancelled the credit card that was in her name, we need to get a new one. Cori has spoken with Julie, who is willing to have her name as owner, with the treasurer an authorized representative.
 - o Grace motions to authorize Julie to get a credit card and have the treasurer be an authorized representative, Sue seconds, motion carries.
 - o Budget – Cori has resubmitted the budget updated to include staff salaries. Lauren motions to approve the budget as amended, Grace seconds, no further discussion, motion carries.
- Rhonda's update re: Loop system grant.
 - o Cori reads portions of this (the entire text can be found in the addenda).

- Her first recommendation is to contact the ALA to clarify if the funds can be reprogrammed or must be returned.
- Joni offers to do this. Grace motions that Joni be authorized to contact the ALA to find out what our options are, and report back at the next meeting. Sue seconds, no further discussion, motion carries.
- This will be on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Thank you to Rhonda for doing this!
- Martha's letter regarding the website agreement.
 - On the advice of legal counsel, we acknowledge these concerns and will address them, but should not go forward acting on these at this point.
 - Martha – has done some research.
 - Cori – this is not a public forum for this, no names can be mentioned. We have passed on the letter to legal counsel.
 - Martha points out that there is a picture from the website being used as advertising, she will send that information to Grace.
- How to proceed with no director. We are back in the position of not having a director, and need to consider options to address this.
 - Proposal from Nina:
 - Nina reads her proposal regarding director duties. Please see addenda for a copy of this.
 - Adelle adds that Nina has come up with a community quarterly, where the community can come together and discuss what they would like to see the library turn into. Cori points out that this is part of the Strategic Plan, which is the Board's purview. Adelle points out that as Community Resource Coordinator, bringing people into the library is part of Nina's job.
 - Joni thanks Adelle and Nina and states that she has heard from many people how much their warmth and friendliness despite recent turmoil has meant to library patrons.
 - The way the library receives appropriation from the town for salaries has changed recently, which has affected how raises work. The Select Board did not approve more funding, and it is up to the board to allocate these funds.
 - Joni – We will not have a Director for the immediate future, and Nina has presented a proposal for the interim, while they are shouldering responsibilities that would normally be done by a Director.
 - Cori – would like to look into what the Board could do, for free. For salaries, we would have to present to the Select Board again for this fiscal year.
 - How do we do evaluations without a Director? What is our secession plan? We need to have a liaison between the Board and Staff (without a Chair).
 - Joni -can we move forward with asking the Select Board to allow us to appropriate funds to people?
 - Sue – we need a reason to give people a raise.
 - Grace – The fact that the library is operating with two people instead of three is a good starting point to talk about salaries and restructuring the way the money in the budget is spent.
 - We should include a vice chair when we elect officers in March. Do we need to change the bylaws beforehand to do this?
 - Joni – this issue is more pressing, we need to do something before March.
 - We will set up a special meeting to determine if we should ask the Select Board for a temporary raise for the interim.

- Joni – do we need an executive session?
- Grace – we should have a special meeting soon, a short one with just this on the agenda.
- Agenda should include overview of Director’s duties, what needs to be addressed, what the Board can do to help. This will be in open meeting, executive session with Adelle and Nina to discuss salaries.
- Adelle will make copies of the director’s job description for board members to reference.
- Special meeting will be Thursday January 30th, 5:30pm at the library.
- Lauren motions to have Cori chair the next two meetings, Sue seconds, no discussion, motion carries.
- Board Member Retreat at Manchester Library is on February 5th, Cori will send details to the Board.
- Special Meeting is January 30, 5:30 at the library.
- Chair for next meeting – Lauren motions for Cori to stand as temporary chair for the next two meetings, Sue seconds, motion carries.
- Reflection on Operating Norms.
- Public Comment:
 - Richard – As a patron it is wonderful to have Adelle and Nina and the continuity they provide, and hopes they have everything they need to continue here.
 - Nori – echoes this statement, it’s been really hard and everyone is doing the best they can, respects people showing up to continue the dialogue.
 - Martha – please don’t forget about revising the website, it is not user-friendly, or about the money spent on it.
- Lauren motions to adjourn, Joni seconds, no discussion, motion carries.
- 7:50 meeting adjourned.

Next special meeting is January 30, 2025, 5:30 pm at the Pawlet Library.

Next regular meeting: February 11, 2025, 5:30 pm at the Pawlet Library.

Dated January 19, 2025, Grace Larson, Secretary.

Addenda

MEMORANDUM

To: Pawlet Public Library Board of Trustees

From: Rhonda Schlagen

Date: January 7, 2024

Subject: Next Steps for the Libraries Transforming Communities Grant

Background

The Pawlet Public Library was selected for the prestigious Libraries Transforming Communities: Accessible Small and Rural Communities grant, a national initiative by the American Library Association (ALA). This competitive program awarded the library \$10,000 to improve accessibility, with a specific focus on supporting individuals who are hard of hearing. Being one of just 250 libraries across the United States to receive this grant is a remarkable accomplishment—something to celebrate!

The grant also came with access to resources, including ongoing technical and project support from ALA and virtual training to strengthen the project director's community engagement skills. These resources were intended to help the library create lasting benefits for the community. I've reviewed the documents with the intent of supporting you, as a board, to help the library fulfill this promise.

Grant Commitments and Activities

The grant outlined several deliverables, many of which were initiated but remain incomplete due to unexpected challenges. Below is a summary of the commitments and their current status:

1. Training for project director

- **Requirement:** A 4-6 hour virtual training session to equip the project director with skills for community engagement and accessibility facilitation.
- **Status:** It is assumed this training was completed, as it was a prerequisite for the subsequent community consultations that we understand were conducted.

2. Community conversations

- **Requirement:** Host at least one community conversation to gather input from residents with disabilities, identify accessibility priorities, and refine the project plan.
- **Status:** We understand at least one community discussion was organized, but I wasn't able to review related notes and recalled information by participants has been inconsistent.

3. Loop Hearing System installation

- **Commitment:** The grant proposal submitted by the Pawlet Library committed to installing a loop hearing assistance system. This commitment stemmed from a conversation between the (former) board chair and a patron who suggested it, and was further validated by the Pawlet Community Church's use of the same system. However, the proposal did not reference broader research into other potential accessibility options or the full costs involved in the installation or maintenance of the system.

- **Status:** Information about the consistency, systematization and rigor of the research into the Loop system has been inconsistent, but the general sense now seems to be that it is not fit-for-purpose. No information is available about the specific vendor and cost details and no system was purchased or installed.
4. **Outreach and promotion**
 - **Requirement:** Share project updates and outcomes through local forums such as Front Porch Forum, social media, and the library's website to inform and engage the community.
 - **Status:** Initial outreach about the grant was conducted, but understandably, promotional efforts stalled as the project did not progress.
 5. **Reporting requirements**
 - **Requirement:** A final report, including narrative and financial details, was due to the ALA by June 30, 2024.
 - **Status:** It can be assumed that the ALA would have sent email notifications requesting the submission of this report. However, without access to these communications, the specific reporting requirements and any associated penalties for non-compliance are unknown.

Recommendations

1. **Contact ALA to determine fund status**
 - Reach out to the ALA Public Programs Office 1-800-545-2433, ext 5045 or publicprograms@ala.org to clarify if the funds can be reprogrammed or must be returned. Propose reprogramming the funds for research and potential implementation of an alternative accessibility solution.
 - Suggest using the funds to support:
 - Expert consultation on accessibility technology options.
 - Broader community engagement to identify preferred solutions.
 - A pilot or phased implementation of a selected system.
2. **Reconnect with community partners**
 - Follow up with [Laura Siegel](#), Director of Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind Services, State of Vermont, to take her up on her offer of support, and ask for guidance on evaluating system options and best practices.
3. **Reengage the community**
 - Relaunch consultations with hard-of-hearing residents and, potentially, with other accessibility challenges to reaffirm needs, gather input on alternative systems, and build excitement for the project's next phase.
4. **Conduct research on accessibility solutions**
 - Collect cost estimates and usability feedback for multiple assistive listening systems, considering both the loop hearing system and other technologies.
5. **Develop and submit a revised proposal or report, as required**
 - Present ALA with a clear and actionable plan that includes the results of the research, the proposed alternative system, and a detailed timeline for its implementation.

This grant remains a bright opportunity for the Pawlet Public Library to demonstrate its leadership in creating a welcoming, accessible, inclusive space for everyone. By addressing these next steps, the library can turn a challenging situation into a success story that benefits the entire community.

Nina Dubois

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December 26th, 2024

Dear Board Members & Trustees,

I am here today to propose an alternative vision for the Pawlet Public Library. The last couple of weeks, patrons and people in the Pawlet community have asked me, "How can we be creative?" in regards to the future of our precious resource, and it is a question I have taken to heart. I care a lot about this space, as many of you do. It was a safe haven for me as a new mother and I am committed to helping build a brighter future for our library.

With that being said, I propose that community and board members consider appointing both Adelle and myself as co-directors of the Pawlet Public library. I have watched my friend and coworker take on much responsibility this past year, with little to no recognition. My intention, if approved, is to take on some important obligations like instate grant writing and the children's department, including the children's programming and book ordering. This would require an increase in my hours and hourly wage. I believe strongly that it is in our libraries best interest to move toward something co-operative, even just temporarily, until the board can find a new staff member with the certifications they require. This is an interim solution that will hopefully pave a new way for the library to operate.

On another note, Adelle and I submitted our requests for a pay increase a while ago and have received nothing but lip service about if/when that will happen. As someone who handles fundraising for the library, I know it is within the budget to compensate us honorably. If you believe that teachers deserve a raise, then you believe in paying livable wages to folks who work in information services. We deserve to earn a pay that reflects the responsibilities we carry.

I ask patrons, board and community members to consider what I've proposed here today. We have an opportunity to reimagine how we want to feel, what we want to see, hear and experience at our library. Let's use our imaginations and our voices now.

Sincerely,

Community Resource Coordinator