

Minutes of the Board of Trustees

The Town of Amherst and the Jones Library, Inc.

February 2, 2008
Large Meeting Room

The meeting was called to order at 2:10 p.m.

Present: Trustee Wang, Trustee Holland, Trustee Turner, Trustee Greenbaum, Trustee Page. Absent: Trustee Grose

Also Present: Bonnie Isman, Tina Swift, and 11 members of the public. Nick Grabbe, Press was also present.

President Wang: Welcome to the second annual public forum. Public funding (tax dollars) pays about 71% of the budget. About 25% is private funding (Friends, Annual Fund, endowment interest) and another 4% is State Aid to Libraries. The past few years have been tough for the library and private funding has increased significantly. The Annual Fund has risen from about \$25,000 to this year's goal of \$55,000.

The Trustees introduced themselves.

Ms. Isman gave a budget presentation. See: Handout. Preface: The Library sees its role to stimulate and support the entire civic life of Amherst. Provide access to Library materials (books, cd's, etc.); assist people in retrieving info (Ref. Dept.); preserve community's history, particularly local and local family history (Spec. Coll. And online svcs.); the Library is a meeting place with art gallery, children's music series, Valentine baskets, etc. where people can develop community spirit.

Ms. Isman pointed to the pie chart on the handout. The next bar chart deals with PAC support which is really the General Fund support. On the flip side, Ms. Isman discussed cherry sheet changes and how the state aid has been consistently lower.

Turning to the yellow sheet, Ms. Isman spoke of the "as is" budget. This continues the same Library staffing, hours, and services as it is currently. This shows a funding gap of \$28,000 needed to fund the as is budget. On the back of the yellow sheet, statistics show we are the 5th most heavily used library in Massachusetts. This is a very high performing library.

Ms. Holland spoke about the endowment and how those funds are used. She noted that the endowment has remained reasonably stable since 2005 (after losing \$1,000,000 in the year 2000). Current balance:\$8,751,366.87. The Trustees are committed to spending no more than 5.4% of the interest even though good financial management practices recommend spending no more than 5%.

Public:

Comment – the materials budget is level funded which means cuts in available materials. This budget does not support the acquisition of library materials that we depend on.

Who makes the decision that the Library cannot use the overdue fines? How can this be changed?

One member of the public suggested cutting staff to make up for the fine money that the Library cannot retain. He spoke sharply regarding the Fin Com's role in budget prep.

One person asked what the cherry sheet is. Another asked how state aid can keep going lower. Another man praised the Fin Com as dedicated volunteers who are not 'the enemy.'

Ms. Holland noted (using Mr. Musante's chart) that the Library budget has gone up the least of all Town departments.

A woman made an impassioned plea to keep the ESL program where she tutors.

Questions were asked about salary increases.

One person suggested cutting library hours on the least utilized day of the week.

"Hours are easy to restore, shutting down a branch library is difficult to restore." Ms. Turner disagreed, saying hours are difficult to restore.

Mr. Grabbe left.

One patron praised online services and asked if more volunteers could help the budget crisis.

Mr. Greenbaum noted that both Northampton and Wellsley pay 90% of the library budget from municipal funds (as opposed to private funding). "We must keep the endowment healthy," he said to enable all of the programs which the Jones offers. He noted 'the very special function' that the endowment plays in the budget of the Jones.

Ms. Turner added that the Library makes Amherst more of a tourist destination. Ms. Holland spoke of the next Town-wide public forum on Feb. 11th.

Ms. Moran (Fin. Com.) stated that last week's Town-wide budget gap is \$1.4 Million. The Town Mgr. has submitted a budget, but all of the schools' budgets are 'in flux' and not set. She reminded the group of the 2.5% limit on the growth of property taxes, which limits the revenues available for municipal budgets.

The same woman as previously asked for assurances that the ESL program would not be cut in its entirety because it is 'demoralizing.'

Mr. Greenbaum congratulated the Library on its 'self help' by employing many methods of fund raising.

One man pointed out that many municipal needs may be urgent, such as the need for more fire or police personnel and libraries seem to suffer more in response. One woman noted that this is a good time to petition Ellen Story to try to restore state aid to libraries.

Ms. Turner told the group that Harvard and Yale spend a smaller percentage of their endowment than the Jones spends.

The public left at 3:30 p.m.