

Rockingham Free Public Library
Board of Trustees
Tuesday, July 11, 2023

Trustees Present: Carol Blackwood (Chair), Don Tretler, Martha Rowley, Margo Ghia, Wendy Levy
Staff Present: Ian Graham (Director)

1. Call to Order
 - a. Carol Blackwood called the meeting to order at 6:34pm
2. Approve minutes from March 9, 2023, and May 2, 2023
 - a. A motion was made by Wendy Levy and seconded by Martha Rowley to approve the minutes from the March 9, 2023 meeting. All approved. Motion passed.
 - b. A motion was made by Wendy Levy and seconded by Don Tretler to approve the minutes from the May 2, 2023 meeting. All approved. Motion passed.
3. Additions to Agenda for routine administrative matters and/or pressing matters that will require ratification at a future meeting
 - a. None
4. Public Comment (3 minutes per person)
 - a. None
5. End of Year Budget update
 - a. Ian Graham updated the Trustees that the Library's finances will not exceed the budget.
 - b. Ian Graham is working with the Town of Rockingham's Finance Office to reconcile some of the expenditure locations to reflect grant usage.
 - c. Ian Graham is working with the Town of Rockingham's Finance Office on how to process accrued payroll so payrolls split between two budget years can be appropriately accounted for.
6. Motion: Accept Trustee resignation; approve interim Trustee candidate
 - a. Trustee Claudia Sofield sent in a letter of resignation. Margo Ghia made a motion, with Wendy Levy seconding, to accept the letter of resignation. The Trustees wish her well.
 - b. Ian Graham put forth a Trustee nomination for the board to consider. The nominee is Mike Sola.
 - c. Martha Rowley made a motion, with Don Tretler seconding, to put forward Mike Sola's name to the Rockingham Selectboard to fill in as a Trustee for the remainder of this term based on the information provided by Ian Graham. Carol Blackwood, Don Tretler, Martha Rowley and Margo Ghia approved. Wendy Levy abstained. Motion passed.
7. Discussion and Possible Motion: Union agreement and Union negotiation schedule
 - a. The trustees discussed where the current union negotiations stand.
 - b. Wendy Levy shared written thoughts on her experience with the negotiations process and made recommendations to consider for the future. A copy of the letter is attached to the minutes.
8. Discussion: Regular RFPL updates at Town of Rockingham and Village of Bellows Falls governing meetings
 - a. Wendy Levy proposed giving regular updates to the Town of Rockingham at Selectboard meetings. A discussion was held and a decision was made to postpone this discussion until after the September 26 Selectboard meeting.

9. Notice: Selectboard Invitation for Library Trustees to attend September 26 Selectboard meeting to discuss capital needs, grants, and budget needs
 - a. The Trustees are pleased to accept the invitation and attend in September. At the Trustees September meeting, it will be decided who will attend and what key points the Trustees want to share with the Selectboard.
10. Other Business
 - a. None
11. Review Action Items, Propose Agenda Items for Next Meeting
 - a. Next Trustees meeting will be on September 5 at 6:30pm.
 - b. Discussion of items for the Selectboard presentation on September 26.
12. Review and Approve Warrants
 - a. Ian Graham will have trustees to come in to sign warrants.
13. Adjourn
 - a. A motion was made by Wendy Levy and seconded by Martha Rowley to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 7:39pm.

Library Trustees Meeting Proposals

July 11, 2023

Wendy M. Levy

Union Negotiations Schedule Change Proposal

Participating in the union negotiations was a horrible experience for which I was ill-prepared, and there are a few reasons for that. But, I signed up for it, and I'll continue doing it.

As a result, a few questions and concerns have come to mind:

1. Why is this process so adversarial?

When I petitioned to be elected as a library trustee, I did so to represent and work for ALL parties involved in the library:

- The other trustees
- All of the library's workers, including part-timers, full-timers, and the director.
- The building and its collections.
- All patrons.
- Rockingham taxpayers.

I didn't seek election to fight against our librarians.

This library's staff organized a union because their jobs were being threatened by a previous iteration of the trustees. There's damage there that may not have been fully mended. Part of our responsibility is to continue mending that rift, and supporting our librarians is what that looks like.

2. Why are union representatives coming from the regional office to do all the negotiations on the Staff's behalf? Can collective bargaining happen just with the library staff?

There are two major ways unions negotiate contracts: in a hierarchical, top-down system, which is what we have now, and a democratic, bottom-up system. In the latter, the staff negotiates their own contracts, with reps from the regional union there to assist if needed. A democratic collective bargaining system is more effective and less adversarial than what we're doing now, and learning to negotiate is a powerful skill for all workers to have. Having the staff negotiate their own contract makes more sense from an operational standpoint, too; the workers and the director know better than anyone what they need, what the library as a whole needs, and what the community will support.

Our job, as I see it, is to provide stewardship for the entire process, to help assess what's appropriate and sustainable for RFPL, and to advocate for our library and its workers before the selectboard, town meeting, and the community in-general.

3. Why are trustees interested in negotiating the staff contract not trained in any way?

I agreed to take part in the contract-negotiations because I have time, I want to learn, and I want to bring my knowledge and skills to the process.

Prior to the first union meeting, Ian gave me some information about the library's finances, and how RFPL compares to other Vermont libraries. But, nobody talked to me about our goals, the history of this process, the story of why the staff organized, how this process relates to the Town of Rockingham's negotiations with other town staff, the staff's perspective, or what our chair hoped to achieve. I'm a quick study, so I caught on to a few things on the fly, but it left me at a distinct disadvantage, which left us all and the whole process at a distinct advantage. All members of a team must be informed and included ahead of time, with their input solicited.

4. Can we plan better next time? Can we form an actual committee in advance of these negotiations? If so, whomever leads this committee should provide clear communications to the other members of the committee, as well as the director and the shop steward, before contract negotiations begin. And, anyone taking part in this committee should get trained from a municipal, pro-labor perspective. Let's learn from our RFPL history: we are NOT the opposing party of our librarians.

5. Why are we negotiating staff contracts after town meeting has already approved the library's budget? This doesn't seem productive or make any sense, and it then creates an adversarial foundation. Why negotiate a budget when we are absolutely limited in the wages and compensation we can offer? Why negotiate a contract before we've had a chance to engage with the community on what our staff has said they need to best serve that community?

6. Can we ask the shop steward to poll the staff about whether they'd like to negotiate their own contract?

7. When we sit down to negotiate the contract, can all parties sit at a round table, mixed in with another? Why must we literally sit on opposite sides of a table when we're all there for the same reason: to support RFPL. This is not an "us versus them" situation.

8. Can we begin negotiating next year's contract NOW? Can the staff and the shop steward come up with a proposal to convey what they need, and what they think the library and the community will support? Then, can the director and the trustees (as a whole, or in a subcommittee) review it and discuss it together? Then, can we include that in our budget, and present it to the selectboard and town meeting, and defend the wages and benefits if necessary? This way, after town meeting approves the RFPL budget, then we can draft next year's staff contract with this approved budget in mind.

9. Who decides all this? Do we? Is it the staff? The union?

These are possible motions we can make to move this project along:

#1: The RFPL trustees form a contract-negotiation subcommittee.

#2: The RFPL trustees begin developing the staff contract for the following fiscal year during the summer of the previous fiscal year, before the selectboard's budget season begins.

#3: We only sit at a round table during staff contract negotiations.

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