

AMESBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY
Board of Trustees
Special Meeting - April 24, 2009

Call to Order: 10:20 am

Members Present: Sydney Baily-Gould, Laura Buckley, Mary Dunford, Ann Iacobucci, Christine Johnson, Johanna Kimball, David Oxton, Jane Ward, Sue Zielinski

Library Staff Present: Katie McDonough

Visitors: Mayor Kezer, Jeannine Bailey, Stephen Dunford, Lynne Hendricks

Reduction in hours or services: Johnson stated she was shocked to learn of the decision made at the April 8 meeting to close the library by one full day. She said that given the rough economic times, a decision of this kind impacts everyone in the community who may need to check out free materials or do job searches. She noted that the three trustees absent on the 8th were the most senior trustees who all looked forward to having some input into the decision at this special meeting. Johnson made a motion to have the Board reconsider the vote made on the 8th that reads “the library hours will change effective Monday, April 27, 2009, with new hours as follows: Closed on Sunday and Monday, open Tuesday and Wednesday 10am-9pm, open Thursday through Saturday 10am-5pm.” Iacobucci seconded.

Buckley assured Johnson, Iacobucci and Zielinski that impact was thoroughly discussed at the meeting on the 8th. She noted that these were terrible choices but some decision had to be reached to deal with the reality of staff shortages and service levels. Johnson asked if the FY10 budget reflects the Monday closure, and McDonough replied that the budget includes Monday as a day of operation.

Zielinski reviewed the history of making these closings, noting that Thursday was cut in 2006 and said at that time to be only temporary. She said she worries that this decision will put us in a similar situation where something said to be temporary persists for years. She read from the long range plan a section that notes the library should actually be looking into expanding hours, and she asked if a statement could be made that this measure is only temporary due to present budget cuts. Buckley replied that at this point we don't know if this is a temporary situation or not so a statement might be premature.

For clarification, McDonough reviewed the timeline of how the library arrived at this situation. She stated that on November 25, two staff members resigned. On December 11 she met with the mayor to discuss local aid cuts future layoffs as a result. She told him at that time that she wasn't comfortable hiring to fill those positions if there was a possibility of the new hires being laid off. The Mayor asked for time to consider the possibility of the two hires. On December 22 it was decided that hiring for the positions

would be frozen. In February, the Mayor made a round of layoffs, resulting in the elimination of an administrative position at the library.

Ward suggested that the Mayor jump in at this time to address both his thinking during that process and his vision for the library in the future. Iacobucci asked if first it would be clarified whether or not staff would be present in the library on Mondays although the building is not open to the public. McDonough stated that there will in fact be a skeleton crew present to do book check in. Iacobucci stated that this appears as a situation where the entire town is being inconvenienced for staff considerations. McDonough explained that the book order coming in from the consortium libraries is enormous, and would be a very large job if it waited to be done on Tuesday. She reiterated that this will only be a skeleton crew.

Iacobucci suggested withdrawing from the consortium and becoming a facility for check in and check out of books only. McDonough said that option of reducing services and the other option of reducing hours were the ones discussed on the 8th. Zielinski asked if staff hours could be rededicated during open hours. McDonough answered that there are too few staff members to make this possible. She said it was her judgment that either the library had to close for one day or stop offering services such as homework help, patron assistance, programming, and book groups.

Mayor Kezer addressed the Board. He acknowledged that these are difficult times and the Board was faced with a set of bad choices. He noted that McDonough and DiTullio lobbied hard to replace the open positions but that he also had several difficult decisions to make in order to keep costs down. He said that he hopes the Monday closure will be temporary, with positions ready to be filled pending the passage of the FY10 budget, but he noted that the elimination of the administrative position was a permanent move.

Kezer also assured the Board that he is committed to remaining in the consortium and fulfilling minimum hours to make that possible. Both Dunford and Oxtan agreed that consortium membership is essential. Iacobucci asked if we might petition the MBLC to lower their standards during this economic downturn in order that libraries facing hard times could stay accredited. Baily-Gould explained that the MBLC has strict guidelines because towns lose incentive to fund libraries if the minimum levels are waived. Kezer again stated that he is committed to making sure funding levels meet the guidelines. He added that as dire as the budget is, the moves he made in February have positioned the Town for meeting the challenges in the new budget year.

Johnson said she was concerned with the Director's decision to go to Town Hall before bringing the issue to the Board. McDonough said she had to approach the Mayor first because of the status of the hiring freeze and regarding the issue of adding hours back. She added if she had known sooner that the answer from the Mayor's office would be a negative one, she would have brought the dilemma to the Board as early as January or February. She only found out on April 2 that adding hours back would not be possible. At that time, she stated, she told the Mayor's aide that this meant there would be a choice

between reducing hours and services, and that the question would go to the Board on April 8.

Zielinski asked, in the event the FY10 budget passes and positions are open for hiring, how soon they could be filled? She wondered if temps could fill the gap time until permanent staff is hired. McDonough said she believed it would be an employers' market and anticipated getting a good number of candidates to choose from. She also noted that the positions covered in the FY10 budget won't fully staff the library, but will enable the library to get back to a working minimum.

Visitor Jeannine Bailey suggested that perhaps it would be a good idea to look at closing the children's library in the evenings rather than close the library completely for the one full day. Buckley noted that she felt it would be too difficult to service one segment of the population while turning away another. Bailey then asked if volunteers could do some of the tasks such as shelving to free up staff time. McDonough replied that while volunteers can be added on for short term special projects, union rules would prohibit volunteers from assuming jobs that we would otherwise pay a staff person to do.

Baily-Gould reminded the Board that there was at present a motion on the floor to reconsider the vote made at the April 8 meeting to close the library on Mondays. The Mayor informed Board members that only a Board member who had been present at the April 8 meeting could move to reopen the vote. Johnson withdrew her motion. She noted, though, that four to five staff people present on the Monday seemed like a lot of people and might make a negative impression on public perception of the issue of closing on that day. Buckley agreed that this seemed like a lot of staff and asked if the number could be pared down to two, the full-time weekday staff person and the Director. McDonough said she would work on a rotation schedule that would address this Board concern.

Mayor Kezer thanked the Board for the healthy debate and noted that the special meeting helped to show that all decisions had been thoroughly discussed and vetted.

Meeting adjourned at 12:12pm.
Respectfully submitted,

Jane Ward
Secretary