

Thomas Memorial Library Board of Trustees

Minutes of meeting: Thursday, November 15, 2007 @ 7:00 P.M.

In Attendance:

Evan Roth, Chair
Ed Nadeau, *Secretary*
Pat Bredenberg, Penny Olsen, and Nancy O'Sullivan *Trustees*
Jay Scherma, *Library Director*

Absent: Deborah Tillman Stone and Nancy Marshall (away)

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Minutes of the October 18th were reviewed and accepted as is.

Library Director's Report (October 2007):

Jay was asked to elaborate on the following:

The scope of the data in the monthly report was discussed. It was determined to be adequate for our current needs.

Old Business:

A. TML Study Committee:

At the Cape Elizabeth Town Council meeting on November 5, 2007 the Council unanimously approved the formation of the Thomas Memorial Library Study Committee, as follows:

Committee Purpose

The Thomas Memorial Library was founded in 1919 as a consequence of a donation from William Widgery Thomas. The library consists of a former school house first built in 1849, another former school house built in 1859, the former Pond Cove School Annex constructed in 1912, various additions built in the 1950's and 1960's and a connecting link built in the 1980's.

The Trustees of the Thomas Memorial Library have asked for a study of library space needs as space has become more limited in recent years.

The Thomas Memorial Library Study Committee is hereby created and is requested to accomplish the following:

- Recommend to the town manager a consultant to assist with library planning.
- Seek funding from the Thomas Memorial Library Foundation to assist with the study and provide funding recommendations for the study from existing library funds.
- Conduct a library needs assessment

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- Define a library program projected to serve the patrons of the Thomas Memorial Library and the community of Cape Elizabeth for the next 30 years.
- Develop a conceptual plan for any proposed improvements to library facilities
- Include as part of the program and plan, an analysis of the opportunities to continue to utilize space for records preservation activities
- Recommend a funding plan for any proposed improvements including the potential for both private and public funding.
- Provide regular updates to the Cape Elizabeth Town Council and provide opportunities for public participation in the committee process.
- Develop a plan for any proposed rehabilitation of the structure and for any site changes.
- Provide a final report to the Cape Elizabeth Town Council no later than May 1, 2009.

Committee Structure

The Thomas Memorial Library Study Committee shall consist of the Trustees of the Thomas Memorial Library, a designee of the Thomas Memorial Library Foundation, a designee of the Cape Elizabeth Historical Preservation Society, and a Town Council member who shall be chosen by the Town Council Chairman. The Library Director of the Thomas Memorial Library shall be an ex-officio non-voting member of the committee.

Committee Resources

The Library Director shall be the primary in house staff resource for the committee.

- **Composition of the Study Committee:**

The Town Manager's proposal conflicted with the motion approved at our October meeting:

Motion: The TMLBoT Secretary to draft a letter to the Town Council to:

Form a TML Building Study Committee, and invite the following to actively participate:

- 4 members of the TMLBoT
- The TML Library Director
- 1 member of the Town Council
- 1 member of the TML Foundation
- 1 member of the Historical Society

It is anticipated the study committee will function for approximately 1 year and require several hours a week of active participation by each member

Result: Unanimously approved

Motion: To withdraw the motion approved in October (above).

Result: Unanimously approved.

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Old Business: (continued)

B. Children's program attendance data:

- Children's Program attendance by fiscal year data was included with the August Directors report. Jay & Ed met to re-examine the data in order to identify any actionable trends. (see attached Excel spreadsheet w/graphs) Though a number of observations were made, they did not result in any firm conclusions or recommendations.
Discussion by the board identified constraints that may influence attendance, including but not limited to: size of room, if a program appeared crowded fewer children will continue to attend, availability of parking, age range conformity, potential conflicts, competing programs elsewhere, town demographics of target age range at the time of the program, etc.
Jay will discuss with Rachel Davis and parents of participating children.

C. TML Policy Review committee (Circulation Policy):

- Evan has found what he believes to be the definitive book on Library Law. His conclusion is that there is no clear solution to conflicting laws. He will develop language to satisfy the most people with minimum exposure to legal challenges.
- Current policy at TML is to issue library cards to patrons that are a minimum of 6 years of age. The merits of lowering the age to 5 were discussed. Jay will review impact of changing the age from 6 to 5.
- **Motion:** Prepare and submit a comprehensive circulation policy to the Town Council for approval.
Results: Approved unanimously.

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New Business:

A. Pullman's "Golden Compass":

The following is an e-mail from Nancy Marshall on the topic, dated November 14, including Jay's reply (in Blue) dated November 15:

Dear Fellow Trustees,

Nancy (et al.)-

I very much regret that I will be out of town on Thursday 15 November and will miss the TML Board of Trustees Meeting. I have some comments and questions related to the agenda item under New Business: Pullman's "Golden Compass" that I want to share with you as I would have in person. I confess it is more difficult to "discuss" these issues in an email than it would be face-to-face with the group, but here are my thoughts.

Sometimes these things are unavoidable; thanks for taking the time to share your thoughts.

I will ask that Ed introduce them into the minutes as correspondence.

1) Jay: Have you heard any more from others about the issue raised by the one parent/patron?

Not to date.

Has the supposed email campaign surfaced? If so, has anyone seen the emails?

Not personally but you may wish to check the following website:

<http://snopes.com/politics/religion/compass.asp>

It appears that the patron did not register a formal written complaint, correct?

That is correct. But, I am reading the series now to be acquainted with it just in case.

2) In Jay's 11/7/07 email to staff with a copy to the Trustees, he states that ". . . I have instructed Kevin to seek volunteer help to add patron comment slips to all the books in the YA Fiction collection [underline mine]." I note that these Reader Comment slips are currently put in new books in both the Adult Fiction and Adult Non-Fiction collections, but I am unsure as to whether they are also currently put in new additions to both the YA Fiction and YA Non-Fiction collections.

We are adding them to all new YA acquisitions.

If the answer is "yes" in all new YA books, why are we going back to put slips in older books in the YA Fiction collection, when we are not going to add comment slips to all the older Adult Fiction titles (thank goodness)? Why not simply do as Jay further suggests in his email that ". . . we should probably convey to the public that patrons may request "comment slips" at the Circ Desk for any of our older titles that they borrow and the completed slips will be added to these items as they are submitted." This would have the advantage of consistency across collections, whether Adult or YA, and would preclude the need for an unnecessary additional workload on staff and volunteers. If we start to go down this winding road of some slips here but not there, I fear and foresee that at some point we could be in the position of putting Reader Comment slips in every item in the library, and a bigger waste of time and effort is hard to imagine.

Nancy's point is well-taken and is the direction that I would recommend in all other collections. We have for instance chosen not to add slips to new items for children because we thought the likelihood of children tearing the slips out made them problematic and a source of potential damage to items. It seems that with the size of the adult fiction and non-fiction collections slips "on-demand" is the way to go.

Although as librarians and trustees we oppose labeling of materials in all formats in all collections, I am questioning whether the original innocuous reason for placement of the comment slips for reader input has/will morph into the potential for some patrons by their comments to have a "chilling effect" on others. I am beginning to question in my own mind if

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these Reader Comment slips are in and of themselves a form of labeling. And is there a strong rationale to be made for placing comment slips in works of fiction but not in non-fiction titles, or vice versa, or even at all?

I have considered the possibility of abuse; it is there. But, we are also balancing the possibility that may happen against the growing trend to social networking that are part of the new "web 2.0" view of services where companies like Amazon invite user reviews and libraries are linking services with services like "Library Thing" who employ wiki technologies.

I am comfortable that the risk of abuse is small and that the possibility that a negative comment could trigger a positive response and actual discussion of books and literature might in the long run be a good thing. We may need to make clear that the library does not endorse any of the comments made by patrons on any work.

Is there a history here that I am unaware of?

No, we introduced the slips several years back after I had heard them mentioned as a popular service in a "best-practices" context at a conference and had seen examples in books my mother-in-law was reading from the Brattleboro, VT library.

3) After discussion of this agenda item, if Jay believes it would be helpful in dealing with this issue, the BofT could go on record as supporting . . .

Let's wait and see.

Have a good meeting, and I look forward to receiving the minutes.

Thank you again for sending along your thoughts.

Regards, Nancy

Jay

Other comments and points discussed at the meeting:

- Most patrons have access to open forum discussion i.e. Amazon, blogs, etc.
- The comment slips serve as an outlet for patrons.
- The public's desire to comment vs. administrative cost.
- Should a space be provided on TML web site for book specific comments?
- Jay reports that adding slips to the young adult collection is 50% complete.
- The slips are a totally informal device.

Parked items:

- A. Recycling receptacle at library

Meetings:

- Our next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 20, @ 7:00 P.M.

Adjournment: 7:54 P.M.