

Minutes of Kent Memorial Library Commission

September 12, 2023

Kent Memorial Library

The meeting was opened by Chair Austin Roberts at 7:03 p.m.

Roll Call: *Commission Members:* Corbin Adzigirey, Michael Alexopoulos, Sam Coatti, Becki Fuller, Claire Kawalec, Michelle Kynard, Austin Roberts, Christine Sinopoli, Despina Tartsinis and Bob White

Library Staff: Julie Styles, Director, and Kate Jarest, Associate Director

Board of Selectmen Representative: Jerry Mahoney

Guests: Other staff and the members of the public

Austin asked each Commission member to introduce themselves and give a little background.

Public Participation: Kerry White spoke about the great success of the book sale that raised \$17,600, which supports the library and enriches programs outside of the regular library budget. She thanked all the volunteers for their work.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes of June 13, 2023

MOTION: It was MOVED by Sam Coatti, SECONDED by Claire Kawalec, to approve the June 13, 2023 minutes with the following correction: – "Under Public Participation, #5, the word "down" should be replaced with "done."

VOTED and PASSED with one abstention by Austin Roberts, who was not at the meeting.

Communications:

Book Challenge -- Christine spoke about a Request for Consideration of Library Materials that Julie had received and sent to Bob White, in the absence of Austin, who showed it to his daughter and granddaughter. Christine shared her opinion that the correspondence should have been sent out to the whole Commission before it was shown to anyone else. Julie said that this was her mistake and apologized. Austin suggested that the Policy Committee come up with a process for sharing information like this. No further action by the Commission is needed at this point. It was noted that the book being challenged was in the adult section and was part of the Book Discussion Group – "Rise to the Challenge."

Candidate Request – Neil Hornish had requested use of the auditorium for a First Selectmen debate. An extensive discussion followed. Jerry explained that the library hosting a political event would be a violation of campaign laws. The library cannot host political events, but outside groups can within the library. Derek Donnelly, town attorney, had written a letter to Julie explaining the "Use of Library Relative to Political Campaigns." He wrote that the library hosting a debate "would be a violation of Connecticut's Campaign law." He also wrote "it is my opinion that a political event promoting a candidate is prohibited under the KML policy." Austin asked Despina, as head of the Policy Committee to talk to Derek Donnelly and get clarification. She agreed to do so.

Report of the Director – Julie Styles

1. Julie mentioned the statistics sheet that was sent prior to the meeting.
2. She introduced Kate Jarest as the new Associate Director.
3. They are recruiting for Kate’s former position, Reference Librarian.
4. The library is seeking a new page, a part-time position.
5. The summer reading program was a huge success with Wendy Taylor reporting over 1600 participants in the children’s department.
6. Julie had Kate talk about a positive experience with a woman she aided in the computer section, who thanked the library for helping her through a difficult period a few years ago when she was at the library on the computers working on finding a job.
7. PCB testing was done on August 29, 2023. The results should be available from Chris Matejek in a few weeks.
8. Corbin asked who was responsible for hiring the Reference Librarian and Julie said it was the Director.
9. Corbin asked about the signage that was discussed last month. Julie had made a sign at the teen section that said “Teen Collections Here.” She suggested having a more permanent one made.
10. Christine said that September 17 to 23 was a nationally recognized “Constitution Week” and recommended that a display be made promoting that. It was agreed that is a good idea and Kate was asked to follow through on this.

Standing Committee Reports:

Financial Committee – Claire presented the following financial figures:

General Endowment	\$1,810,114
Capital	\$298,238
Fuller	\$246,703

Claire also reported that they are working on the funds needed for the Commission’s part of the annual budget.

Personnel Committee: Bob White, Chair, reported that the Personnel Committee had met and chosen the following to be the Search Committee for a new Director:

Claire Kawalec – representing the Commission

Carl Casinghino – representing the Foundation

Jim Irwin – representing the Friends

Wendy Taylor – representing the staff and the Union

Karen Ziemba or someone else from Human Resources – representing the town

Christine, Corbin, and Jerry questioned the way this Search Committee was organized. They had the following comments:

1. There was no proper notice of the Search Committee meeting to Commission members. Bob said he gave the town clerk the agenda to post 24 hours before the meeting. He then emailed Commission members about the meeting and invited them to attend the public portion.

2. They said the Search Committee should not have gone into Executive Session. Despina agreed with that and Bob accepted responsibility for making that decision.
3. They said that there should be more than one Commission member on it.
4. Bob said that people had expressed to him that the previous search committee was too large, so he suggested five people.
5. There should be a full process to form the search committee and they felt the motion to nominate people to the Search Committee was not accurate.
6. Frustration was expressed by several people.

Austin reported he spoke with the town attorney, Derek Donnelly before this Commission meeting. Derek recommended the Personnel Committee present their recommendations for the Search Committee to the full KML Commission for discussion and voting.

The agenda would need to be amended to do this.

Bob White MOVED, Sam Coatti SECONDED that the present agenda be amended to include a vote on the Selection of a Search Committee for a new Director. VOTED and passed in the following manner: Yes (Corbin Adzigirey, Michael Alexopoulos, Sam Coatti, Becki Fuller, Claire Kawalec, Austin Robert, Despina Tartsinis and Bob White); No (Christine Sinopoli); Abstain (Michelle Kynard).

New Business:

Formation of Search Committee for New Director – Bob presented the following list of people to serve on the Search Committee for a new Library Director: Claire Kawalec – representing the Commission, Carl Casinghino – representing the Foundation, Jin Irwin – representing the Friends, Wendy Taylor - representing the staff and the Union, Karen Ziemba or someone else from Human Resources – representing the town.

Sam Coatti MOVED, Claire Kawalec SECONDED that the Search Committee for a new Director as presented by the Chair of the Personnel Committee be voted on by the full Commission.

Discussion: Christine feels that there should not be a staff member on the Search Committee. Sam, Bob, and Claire expressed support for the inclusion of a staff member as they can answer questions about the library, know the strengths and weaknesses of the staff, and have served in this capacity before. Michael suggested we go forward with the vote and check on the legality of a staff member being on the search committee. Corbin and Christine reaffirmed that they thought more Commission members should be on the Search Committee.

Michael amended the above motion to read:

Michael Alexopoulos MOVED, Bob White SECONDED, that the Search Committee for a new Director as presented by the Chair of the Personnel Committee be accepted with the verification that it is not illegal for a staff member to serve on the Search Committee for a new Library Director. VOTED and passed in the following manner: Yes (Michael Alexopoulos, Sam Coatti, Becki Fuller, Claire Kawalec, Austin Robert, Despina Tartsinis, and Bob White); No (Corbin Adzigirey and Christine Sinopoli); Abstain (Michelle Kynard)

Sam thanked Julie for her service as Library Director and was sorry to see her leave. She said that the Commission needs to look at the hiring process of the Director as we have lost two Directors after a short period of time.

Public Participation: Many of the public expressed their thanks to Julie for her support and their disappointment that she is leaving. There was also support for having political debates so that people could see the differences between candidates.

The **Next Meeting** will be Tuesday, October 10, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. at Kent Memorial Library.

Austin Roberts adjourned the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Becki Fuller (Secretary)

Edited by Austin Roberts (Chair)