

# Minutes of Kent Memorial Library Commission

November 14, 2023

Town Hall

The meeting was opened by Bob White, Acting Chair, at 7:00 p.m.

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

*Library Staff:* Kate Jarest

*Board of Selectmen Representative:* Colin Moll

**Public Participation:** None

**Approval of Minutes:**

It was moved by Sam Coatti and seconded by Despina Tartsinis to accept the minutes of October 10, 2023.

The following corrections were made:

1. Christine noted that, Under VI, Standing Committees, paragraph 4, "Someone" should be changed to "Christine."
2. Corbin reported the following:
  - A. Under II, Public Comment, paragraph 3, Nina Kendrick also commented that "She thanked Melissa Mack and Colin Moll and she appreciates the library staff."
  - B. Under II, Public Comment, paragraph 4, "as parents" should be added after "We."
  - C. Under II, Public Comment, paragraph 7, Steve said "No one wants to ban books. The library is not a source of what Suffield is about He disagrees with the concept that books displayed indicates belonging or not."
  - D. Under II, Public Comment, paragraph 9, Shannon Watson said "Get over it, move on, don't come."
  - E. Under Public Comment, paragraph 10, add "Cy said that it is baffling that someone resigned over this. This is a stupid argument. Shut up."
  - F. Under VII, Filing KMLC Status Update, It says that "The KMLC would like to clarify whether it is a "governing" or advisory" Commission." Corbin is not sure this is accurate. She does not know that the whole Commission asked this. She thought it was a suggestion and the Commission was trying to decide whether to pursue this or not. Austin made the statement. Change it to "Austin suggested we would like to clarify it."
  - G. Under Section X, Public Comment, paragraph 1, regarding Corbin, about clarifying certain points, fine free libraries were brought up, but the Commission wanted more time to ponder this. Change to "The suggestion of fine free library was brought up and postponed." She does not remember a conversation about increasing the fines to bring more revenue for the town. Corbin also said the "Commission did not ask for more LGBTQI labeling." Regarding the idea of "viewpoint neutral," "Corbin said this is also verbiage that is used by the ALA and the Library Bill of Rights. Also, the ALA does not believe that movies with ratings are best practice."
  - H. Under Section X, Public Comment, paragraph 2, Fred Sweitzer said he "advised we review our wording and beef up our ad for the library director."
  - I. Under Section X, Public Comment, paragraph 6, Sarah Tschannen said that "She controls her children in the library."

MOTION: It was moved by Eliza Childs, seconded by Claire Kawalec, to approve the October 10, 2023 minutes with the above modifications. VOTED and PASSED unanimously.

**Communications:** None.

**Report of the Director** – Kate Jarest had emailed out her monthly report to Commission members.

1. Bob noted a chart of circulation and program numbers.
2. The search for a new director is ongoing. Two candidates are being interviewed for this position on October 15, 2023. There are also vacancies for a reference librarian and a page, but those searches are not active. Bob had spoken about activating those searches at last month's meeting. Austin had volunteered to reach out to Human Resources about this. Colin also said he would follow through on this. Sam said it was discussed that it was not necessary to wait for a new director to fill these positions
3. Kate discussed the misuse of the library after school.
  - a. There is bad behavior of some middle school kids between 2:30 and 5:30 p.m. They are disruptive, damage property and are disrespectful. The names of these people are not known. The library staff makes rounds daily to make sure nobody gets hurt, nothing is broken and messes are cleaned up. Some of the students are told to leave, but they return on another day. This negatively affects the library, materials, patrons and staff. The staff is trying to find a solution.
  - b. Police do not have staff to walk through the library. Bob read from the Policy Manual saying that the staff can ask students to leave the library and the patron's library privileges can be suspended for disruptive behavior. These are minors so Kate would need to look into how this is handled and make sure the policy is written down. Sam commented that suspending privileges does not prohibit people from coming into the library.
  - c. Corbin has spoken to some staff members recently and this is a real problem. She was told that some have been banned from local businesses because of their behavior. Parents may not know what is happening. Corbin suggested we contact a resource officer or teacher to identify the kids and then reach out to their parents. Should there be a separate subcommittee or task force to include Parks and Rec, Youth Services and some business owners to discuss this? It may not be just a library problem. Perhaps we can be part of the solution.
  - d. Christine asked what these kids do and Kate said that they rip books, throw books down the stairs, break shelves, spill drinks, open auditorium doors when a movie is being shown, shout racist words and curse to get a rise out of people.
  - e. Corbin said that she thinks some kids hide in the back and do more adult things.
  - f. Sam said we had this same problem years ago and the Suffield Youth Director would come and be the disciplinarian, but it was necessary to have that person because the kids do not listen to staff and staff should not have to deal with that. Some other people stopped coming.
  - g. Colin said there is a youth services director and he suggested six months ago that she should be contacted try to find a solution. Some staff have been in touch with her.
  - h. The staff has been trying to deal with this and Kate said that they tried offering programming for middle school students, but they were not interested in this.
  - i. Mike said this was not unusual for this to happen and did not realize this was a problem at the library.
4. There was a great response to the Scary Story Contest for grades 1 to 5 and there were requests to hold it again next year.
5. Corbin asked if we have the PCP results yet. The report has not been received.
6. Mike suggested that there needs to be a special committee set up to deal with this issue of middle school behavior. We need to get parents involved, gather our resources, and get the school involved.
7. Corbin said one staff member also said it makes them nervous to close up the library and leave in the evening and they do not want their cars vandalized.
8. Eliza said it is crucial to get the schools involved to identify the students.
9. Bob says we could form a special committee to address this. He asked Michael and Corbin to serve on it. Corbin does not participate in the Suffield School system, but is happy to help.
10. Bob suggested we discuss this under New Business and Michael said the formation may need to wait until after the Selectmen vote on the membership of the library Commission.

## **Standing Committee Reports:**

Finance Committee: Claire Kawalec gave the financial report ending September 29, 2023:

General Account is \$1,715, 498

Capital Fund is \$292,307

Fuller Fund is \$242,689

Claire said that typically they meet with the Investment Committee in December to review our progress and strategy going forward. Bob noted that they would get the quarterly rolling averages then. It will take the place on our special meeting. Christine asked for the date of that meeting, which will probably be December 12, 2023.

**Library Director Search Update:** Claire reported that there are two candidates being interviewed (one in person and one on zoom) on October 15, 2023 and they hope they can move forward with one of them.

**Search for Interim Director:** The Personnel Committee had three possible candidates for this position. Two have said they are not interested and one remaining is a former library director. The search is not going forward at this time because, if one of the candidates being interviewed for Library Director is called, there may be no need for an interim.

Claire mentioned the possibility that we may need to post the job for director again, which would cost less than \$1,000. Bob suggested it come out of the library budget. It was moved by Despina Tartsinis, seconded by Eliza Childs and VOTED unanimously to authorize the expenditure of funds for reposting of the position, if needed, from the library budget.

## **New Business:**

1. Bob said that earlier we discussed forming a temporary subcommittee to deal with the problem of some students at the library. Michael said he thought it was a very worthy subcommittee to try to put together soon because it is a problem. We do not want to discourage those who want to be at the library and use it properly. But those who misbehave may cause others to not come. Michael agreed to chair this committee to be called Subcommittee to Deal with Young Patron Behavior. Sam said it would be good to get this behavior out in the public so parents can be aware that this is an issue. Michael believes we should have the right to contact parents if a child has misbehaved at a town facility. Bob also noted it has happened at some town businesses and schools. We can look at this as a town problem and see if the town can help us. Michael thought the committee would reach out to the youth services director. Corbin agreed to help with is committee, but her physical availability during the afternoon period is limited. Sam agreed to serve on this subcommittee.
2. Corbin suggested giving a welcome packet to new members would be very helpful. It could include a list of members, subcommittees (including definitions) and policies/bylaws.
3. Michael said that we need to have a meeting about the Freedom of Information Act, which would be good for new and present members. Despina agreed this training would be good and will work with Derek Donnelly, town attorney, to set up a special meeting for this.
4. Bob thanked Austin and others members who helped make meeting here possible, which allows everyone to hear and others to participate by zoom.
5. Christine has arranged with Kris Lambert, who she thanked, to have all future KML meetings at the town hall.

## **Public Comment:**

1. Sarah Tschannen, who has a middle schooler, recommended talking to Kenneth Smith, Principal, and Thomas Kadamus, Guidance Counselor, who will want to know about this. They also have school resource officers, one of whom is Officer Roman, who is in the school all the time. She also recommended getting the school council involved.
2. Tess McCool wanted to clarify the comment by one of the Commission members regarding the ALA not believing that movie ratings are best practice. She said that they mean that they do not believe in putting that in a bibliographic record in the catalog which is subjective, not viewpoint-neutral, and done by an

outside group. It would be in violation of the First Amendment. It does not mean that they are going to put R rated movies in the children's section.

3. Fred Sweitzer, regarding the discussion about the issue of young patron's behavior, spoke about serving on the Juvenile Review Board for over twenty years and offered his help to the subcommittee if wanted. He also spoke about the Juvenile Review Board being a resource. It serves as a diversion program for young people who have committed low level crimes. Chaired by Mel Chafetz, they meet once a month and there are representatives of all schools, youth services people and the town youth director present. They deal with the problems and how to encourage good behavior. He also stated that he is concerned about the process for reappointing members to the Library Commission and understands it has evolved over the past years. He will bring this up at the next Selectmen's meeting.
4. Annie Hornish is sorry to hear about the disruptive behavior at the library and thinks there is a process already in place. It has never come up before and she finds it strange if it is a chronic problem. She is glad we are seeking FOIA training. She attended the FOIA training by the FOIA Commission a month ago which was excellent and recommended Commission members attend it next year. They also send out people to train in person or zoom and she recommends that over using the town attorney, Derek Donnelly, who she says has had FOIA violations.
5. Beth Chafetz is not surprised with the issue of the middle schoolers since she is a former teacher at the middle school. It is important to identify the kids that are the problem because parents are the key. She would be happy to help with the Committee.
6. Kathy Harrington wanted to discuss that, under New Business tonight, Bob brought up the creation of a new Committee. There was extensive talking about it and he was not required to make a motion and have that be voted on by the Commission to have that discussion. At the last meeting, Corbin and Christine were required to have motions voted on before their New Business was discussed. This was improper process. Corbin was prevented from discussing what she wanted to at the regular meeting. However, discussion tonight went forward without a motion. Regarding this, Bob said there was a motion made, but not seconded, so it could not continue. Kathie said Corbin was required to make a motion, which she should not have been required to do, as Bob was not required at tonight's meeting.
7. Corbin said that in last month's meeting under IX New Business, "Corbin moved and Christine seconded a motion to discuss the points in the farewell letter posted in the Suffield Observer by the former Library Director." Michael said that the motion was made, seconded, and failed. Christine said that Kathie was saying that it was a double standard for some and not others.
8. Jill Adams wanted to say that she has been at the library and wants to compliment how well all the librarians are doing. She saw kids having a good time. She is happy there are a couple people to be interviewed for Director. She is sure the librarians will work well with the next directors and she is grateful for all the librarians in Suffield.
9. Andi Prusi spoke in support of the library staff and the great job they are doing. She has seen some of the behavior and it is not for lack of programming, which the staff has offered. These kids do not attend. The librarians try to support the kids in town and she gives them a lot of credit. She is looking forward to seeing people being reelected who want to continue to serve on the Commission. She looks forward to a new director being hired, as well as filling the other vacancies so that the staff can continue without being burned out.

The **Next Meeting** will be Tuesday, January 9, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall.

Bob White adjourned the meeting at 8: 10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Becki Fuller (Secretary)

Edited by Bob White (Acting Chair)