

**KENT MEMORIAL LIBRARY COMMISSION
SUFFIELD CT**

Special Meeting Minutes

Location: Suffield Town Hall Meeting Room and Zoom
Date: Tuesday, December 12, 2023, at 7:45pm

The meeting was called to order by the Acting Chair Claire Kawalec (Treasurer) at 7:45pm

I. Roll Call : *KMLC Members Present* – Corbin Adzigirey, Michael Alexopoulos, Claire Kawalec, James Irwin, Denise Boutin, Klaira Bielonko, Christine Sinopoli, Lester Webb, Nina Kendrick, Michelle Kynard, and Despina Tartsinis
KMLC Members Absent – Cameron Lisk
Board of Selectmen Present – Jerry Mahoney (Liaison) and Colin Moll (First Selectman)

II. Welcome to New Commission Members. Claire K. welcomed new members, noted that Despina T. will be taking the minutes this evening and has circulated a contact form to be completed. An email will be circulated to all KMLC members with the bylaws including committee information and KML policies.

III. Public Comment.

Robert White, Suffield resident, welcomed new members to the commission and thanked them for committing their time and talent in volunteering for this position. He noted that there has never been more than 3 new members at any given time. He offered some resources to new members and proceeded including online handbooks regarding trustee responsibilities, the KML website and policies. Mr. White noted that a lot of the policy formation work has been done by subcommittee members, and noted there are 10 subcommittees and 12 members. Mr. White explained that each member of the KMLC is encouraged and expected to serve on 2 or 3 subcommittees, and there are 4 officers that will serve annual terms per the KMLC bylaws with an election each January. Mr. White finally noted that he assisted in developing the KML mission and philosophy statement. As of last week, there are no longer KMLC members that were involved in that process.

Tess McCool, Suffield resident, community member, and librarian, feels there is a lot of misinformation regarding what public libraries can and cannot do and role of library in community. She expressed that the freedom to read is protected by the US constitution and politics should not play a role in the function of the library. Ms. McCool urged the commission, including new members, to familiarize themselves with the rights and responsibilities of library commission members. She feels some people have spread misinformation and false information regarding alleged agendas and LGBTQIA issues, including an agenda to turn kids trans or cause irreversible bodily harm, or force them to view pornography – this is untrue. Ms. McCool noted that no one is forced to check out materials, and parents have the right to decide what materials their children are exposed to. She also expressed concern that some suggest the a Library Director should not have a degree from an ALA accredited college, noting that someone may be a good manager but failing to have an understanding of libraries may lead to violations of the First Amendment. Ms. McCool finally noted that professional Librarians curate a collection of wide varieties and viewpoints and are trained not to let their personal views impact library services. Ms. McCool handed out the ALA's Code of Ethics to all the KMLC.

Neil Hornish, Suffield resident, congratulated the new members of the commission with hopes that they will continue the work of the commission in making the library a place of inclusivity. He also thanked the outgoing members who were not reappointed for their years, and some decades, of service. Mr. Hornish noted that the town website does not currently list a chair or secretary and questioned who called the special meeting this

evening. He stated that new officers should be elected at the first meeting of the calendar year per KMLC bylaws, and wondered what caused the urgency to add the elections to this meeting, and what justifies violating the bylaws.

Beth Chafetz, Suffield resident, wanted to welcome all the new members to this important commission and welcome back Michael A as a former member. Ms. Chafetz wished the commission good luck and the best for an important job, including the support of the library and its staff, soon to be director, and patrons in town who view the library as a welcoming and important part of this community.

Annie Hornish, Suffield resident, congratulated new members, deeply thanked recent members for their many years of service, and moving forward hoped this KMLC will be productive. Per the Bylaws, she noted that new officers are elected at the first meeting of the calendar year. She implored new members to view the bylaws and follow the rules regarding elections and this meeting.

IV. Election of Officers.

Claire K. requested that Despina T. explained that the Bylaws and why we are addressing the Election of Officers tonight. Despina T. reiterated that the KMLC Bylaws do state commission officer elections occur during the first month of each calendar year, however the Bylaws do not address vacancies during the year. At present, Despina T. noted that there are three officer vacancies because of those members not being reappointed to the KMLC. Despina T. noted that Claire K. is the only remaining officer and thus she is acting as Chair of tonight's meeting and called this special meeting to address this issue and the other agenda items. Despina T. stated that since our bylaws do not address vacancies, we are to defer to Robert's Rules of Order and this is noted in our bylaws in Para. 11 that "Robert's Rules of Order shall govern in the parliamentary procedure of this Commission." Robert's Rules of Orders dictate that we should address vacancies via a special meeting. Despina T. stated that we can address a full slate of officers or appoint an interim chair which would give new and existing members an opportunity to digest appointments and duties of officers, or table this all-together however Claire K. does not wish to serve as Acting or Interim chair until the January 2024 meeting, making the appointment of an interim chair necessary.

Corbin A. noted that when she was appointed in 2021, her first meeting was the January 2022 meeting which included the election of officers. Corbin A. recalled that being overwhelmed and appreciated that at the time elections were tabled until February to give the new members at that time an opportunity to go over the process and make an informed decision. Corbin A. noted she is in support of appointing an interim chair and proceeding with elections in January.

Jim I. noted that he was surprised to see this item on the Agenda and agrees with Corbin A. that appointing an interim chair until elections in January 2024 per the KMLC bylaws.

Klaire B. agreed with the comments of tabling the full elections until January 2024. Klaire B. noted that we may want to address vacancies in our bylaws for future elections.

Christine S. agreed with Corbin A.'s concerns and notes she was in the same situation when newly appointed to the KMLC and would like to allow new members an opportunity to acclimate.

Nina K. questioned what the role of the interim chair would be, and would it be mostly communications. Claire K. responded noting that interim/acting chair would be a contact person for town and library staff and would deal with communications or urgent issues that may arise.

Michael A. stated that the commission may want to revisit vacancies and timing in the bylaws, and that the organization meeting may need to happen in December of each year but agreed that time should be given to new members since terms start end at the end of November. Michael A. wanted to make sure that information gets

out and members have time to understand the organizational meeting and keep formal elections in January at this time.

Despina T. expressed that she feels we need to appoint an interim chair and appoint a full slate at the January meeting, so each member can familiarize themselves with the roles of officers, subcommittees. Despina T. noted that she would email all existing bylaws and policies to new and existing members, so everyone makes an informed decision. Finally, Despina T. stated we need to address vacancies going forward but now need to defer to Robert's Rules of Order.

Claire K. stated that we are entering budget season, and with the responsibilities of the finance subcommittee, she would like to appoint an interim chair because she is unable to serve in that capacity beyond this evening.

Jim I. said this all makes sense and suggested that an existing KMLC member serve in the interim role and would like to take himself out of the running.

Michael A. wanted to appoint and nominate Claire K. since the staff is familiar with and trusts Claire K. Claire K. declined. Michael A. stated that he would be willing to serve. Despina T. stated that she was going to nominate Michael A. if he did not step up, since he has served as Chair for much longer than a month in the past and felt he is an excellent candidate, even going beyond January.

Jim I. made a motion to nominate and appoint Michael A. as interim KMLC Chair. Corbin A. seconded the motion. There was some discussion on the motion, specifically Christine S. asked whether we could get descriptions of officer duties before the next meeting, whether we could get a recording secretary so that a commission member can serve and participate in meetings rather than be stuck taking notes, compliance with FOIA, and asked if we could discuss these concerns and place them on the next meeting Agenda. Jim I. noted that other commissions and boards have recording secretaries who are not board members. All KMLC members present voted in favor, with an abstention from Michael A. The motion passed.

Michael A. then took over the meeting as interim Chair of KMLC.

V. Discussion and Approval of Library Director Opening and Search Committee.

Claire K. discussed the candidate presented to the First Selectman Colin Moll, noting that the First Selectman has requested an in-person interview with the candidate. The candidate asked whether the town would pay or reimburse him for travel for the interview. The First Selectman stated that this is not currently in the budget.

Jim I. stated he is a member of the library director search committee and wanted to discuss the search and selection process in general terms. There were 7 applicants, and 4 of them were seriously considered. 2 of the 4 then withdrew. The committee was left with 2 candidates, 1 local and 1 out of town.

Carl Casinghino, member of the library director search committee, commented on the search process and that he was skeptical of getting a qualified candidate and were fully prepared to continue the search if a qualified candidate did not present themselves.

Klaire B. asked about the makeup of the search committee.

Jim I. explained the composition and history of prior search committees. The current search committee consists of 5 members, 1 from KMLC (Claire K.), 1 from the KML Foundation (Carl Casinghino), 1 from the Friends of KML (Jim Irwin), 1 Library employee (Wendy T.) and 1 H.R. Representative (Karin Ziemba). The KMLC personnel subcommittee presented the noted individuals to the full KMLC who then voted them onto the search committee.

Christine S. commented that she has reservations as to the composition of the search committee. She felt that she was sidelined twice, prior to the last director search and this current director search. Christine S. stated that she expressed interest multiple times and feels she was specifically prevented from serving on the search committee. She feels it is problematic that Friends of KML and the Foundation have a seat on the committee, and doesn't think it is proper for a library employee to be interviewing for their own boss. Ultimately, Christine S. felt that sometimes there is a need to interview more people and take time to find the right candidate. First Selectman Colin M. asked Christine S. why she felt she was barred from the search committee. Christine S. responded that Robert White was the head of the personnel committee in the Julie Styles search, and that he gave short notice of meetings of the personnel committee, and she never got a clear answer why she couldn't serve on the search committee. Jim I. stated he was 1 of 8 people who served on the prior Library Director search committee. Jim I. noted that there was no search committee for Garret P. Despina T. noted she was 1 of the 8 in the prior search committee, and there were 4 KMLC commission members on the prior search committee. Despina T. also noted that subcommittees do not vote and bring all actions to the full KMLC for a vote.

Michael A. that using a municipal employee for input in a search process is a long-standing practice, and found that having a library employee added on the search committee a valuable resource. Michael A. recognized Christine's noted conflict but didn't agree with that. Michael A. noted he did not recall Christine S. being barred from the prior search committee, but understands that is how she felt, and questioned whether it was her position to go out for more candidates.

Christine S. note that we only had 7 candidates and didn't feel that was a lot.

Jim I. noted that 2 of 4 candidates noted they withdrew due to the town conflicts with the library and that the current candidate that was presented to the First Selectman was generally unflappable, was not worried about conflict, and had municipal experience and felt that the candidate would work with the town and the library commission.

Corbin A. noted that she too felt she was barred from the prior search committee. She doesn't agree with the current composition of the committee, however, feels that we need library director. Corbin A. also noted that she did not expect to need a more detailed search committee composition policy so soon after hiring the prior director and feels that we need to get the process into KML policy.

Claire K. stated that she feels it would be a mistake to let the current candidate go, and the candidate is extremely qualified. Claire K. noted her experience in the field of H.R. and feels that we were lucky to get 4 qualified candidates of the 7 that applied for Library Director. She noted that sometimes you get 50 applicants and only 1 qualified candidate.

Corbin A. felt she had to abstain from the vote on the current candidate because she got a resume just before a meeting with no name, and no further info, and felt rushed.

Nina K. stated that we need at least an interim director quickly, and that the last 2 directors did not last long in their positions with a similar search committee composition. She did not like the financial involvement and staff members choosing their own boss. Nina K. feels that in light of the elections the town wants a new direction.

Klaire B. agreed that having folks with financial interest is unethical in the search committee process for hiring a director of the library. She noted that she understands the library employee involvement for their experience and viewpoint, but maybe we could get someone from another town to serve. Klaire also agreed that there is a need for an interim director. Klaire B. felt that the new commission members know nothing of the candidates, and while the candidate could be the right person, but would like the opportunity to revisit and evaluate the applications.

Michael A. asked Claire K. to outline how many hours it took and how many times the committee met to review the candidates. Claire K. outlined that there was an original meeting regarding the posting, Karin Ziembra of the Town's HR Department posted the position, after about 2 weeks the search committee met and reviewed applications, spent approximately 1.5 – 2 hrs at that meeting, and then decided on who to interview. Karin Z. from HR then reached out to schedule the interviews, which were approximately 45 minutes to an hour each. Claire K. noted that they then had a meeting of approximately 30 minutes to discuss the interviews.

Christine S. would like to see the search committee abolished and reconstituted. She would like to defer to the First Selectman regarding Robert's Rules for her motion.

First Selectman Colin Moll noted that he felt that the two members who were barred from the search committee is relevant and stated that he assumed everyone had a fair shake, but now we have a different commission. Colin M. noted that he can't see how the new KMLC can vote for a candidate without knowing the potential candidates. Colin M. stated that the KMLC can hold a special meeting or take this up at the next regular meeting.

Michael A. noted that there are new members on the KMLC, but it is not a new commission. The KMLC voted on presenting a candidate to the First Selectman. Michael A. stated that he does not feel the First Selectman is now suggesting that we revisit every prior vote of the KMLC. Michael A. then asked whether the First Selectman still wanted to meet with the candidate in person. Colin M. stated that he does want an in-person interview with the candidate. Michael A. noted this made perfect sense to want to meet the candidate in person for an important position like this, and that it has been done in the past for other municipal employees to pay to bring the candidate in for an interview, not for a library director, but it has been done for other municipal positions, i.e. superintendent of schools. Michael A. noted that it is cumbersome to bring all candidates to a full commission of 12, hence why a search committee is appointed, and each commission member has the right to revisit a decision of the commission. Need someone who voted on the prevailing side to revisit the prior motion of the KMLC.

Christine S. noted that she feels abolishing the search committee is a different issue.

Despina T. noted that because this is a special meeting that we need to stay on point with the Agenda and agreed that we need to address our policies and how a search committee is formed in the future. Former Chair of the KMLC Austin Roberts had come up with a guide for the search committee, but the KMLC did not anticipate hiring another director so soon. Despina T. noted that in her experience in past committees and commissions, stakeholders are often involved in municipal searches. Despina T. noted that quite a few commissioners serve in dual roles, i.e. serve on KMLC and one of the stakeholders noted, and she feels that would be beneficial going forward.

Claire K. noted that 2 of the KMLC need to be on the board of the Foundation.

Christine S. emphatically disagreed regarding stakeholder involvement. Christine S. stated that the groups raise money for the library, she feels they are seeking reward with a seat on KMLC.

Jim I. felt that in his role as a Friend of KML has no vested interest in anything other than serving the public and the good of the library, making sure it is a free public library. He also gets no financial benefit from his role.

Colin M. noted that the motion had been made by Christine S., but Michael A. noted that the motion had not been seconded. Also, Michael A. noted that a motion to abolish the search committee was not proper per the Agenda. Claire B. noted that the agenda item was a bit ambiguous, and Michael A. agreed. Michael A. asked Claire K. to clarify the agenda item. Claire K. noted that the agenda item was added to the agenda at the First Selectman's recommendation. Colin M. then noted that maybe the correct motion was for the new commission to approve the library director candidate forwarded by the former commission. Michael A. noted that the KMLC already voted on this candidate, and in order to overturn a prior KMLC a motion needed to be made by someone who voted in favor

of that action. Despina T. noted that the vote to send the candidate to the First Selectman for interview was a valid act of the KMLC, and that we should try to get the candidate here for the First Selectman interview, and if we cannot accomplish this, then we may have to repost the position.

Colin M. noted that he wanted to hear what the new KMLC members have to say about the candidate. Jim I. noted he felt that the candidate is qualified and would like the KMLC to fund the candidate's transportation for an in-person interview with the First Selectman and/or HR. Corbin A. asked whether we can come up with a compromise and can some of the KMLC sit on interview with the First Selectman. Michael A. wanted to hear from the new KMLC members. Klaire B. noted that she like compromise and would prefer to look at all 7 resumes that were submitted and see who was qualified or unqualified, not just for reconsideration but for understanding of what constitutes a qualified candidate. Jim I. noted he understood the request, but the process has already been completed with involvement of town's HR and proper vetting. Michael A. then queried the rest of the KMLC members. Denise B. agreed that she wanted to get a better understanding of who the candidate, and who is the librarian's boss, is it the town, and is the KMLC advisory. Corbin A. added that she would like to see the qualified candidates and all resumes, not a nameless resume 2 hours before being asked to vote and would like to be able to do her due diligence. Michelle K. agrees about knowing more about the candidates and seeing resumes, who is she voting for, she is new and is still taking in a lot and agrees we need an interim director. Nina K. thinks the majority of Suffield wants a change of direction at the library, she is concerned that only 1 individual was selected, and has concerns about the search committee and would like a fresh start and opportunity to weigh in on candidates. Less W. notes from an outside perspective he feels the KMLC was rushed to vote on a director, doesn't know if he can take everyone's word on the search committee process, and feels it is an important hire where everyone agrees on the process and the candidate and need to be careful. Nina K. asked whether the posting was paid and where the job was posted. Claire K. confirmed it was not a paid posting and listed the posting sites. Jim I. noted that national postings required a financial commitment that the town was unwilling to make, and Karin Z. had provided the posting information to the search committee. Despina T. noted that during the October meeting she had motioned and the KMLC approved funding a paid posting up to one thousand dollars. Christine S. would like a basis of comparison and needs an exhaustive search to make sure we have the best candidate. Michael A. finally noted that it was not just the recommendation of 1 individual, but the entire search committee of 5 people, commented and presented who they thought was the best candidate. Nevertheless, Michael A. wanted to do what was best moving forward.

A motion was made by Michael A. and seconded by Despina T. to rescind the vote of the KMLC to approve and send the 1 Library Director candidate to the First Selectman for interview. There was discussion on the motion as follows: the candidate after review may still be the best candidate, should we notify the candidate that there will be no interview at this time, keep the candidate in consideration, and should be amended the motion to allow the inclusion of information on applicants and their resumes to the new and existing KMLC members.

The motion as amended to rescind the referral of 1 individual candidate to the First Selectman for an interview, and to allow the KMLC to review all applicants, but for the 2 withdrawn candidates. The motion passed with 10 in favor (Corbin A., Klaire B., Michelle K., Claire K., Denise B., Christine S., Nina K. Less W. Despina T., and Michael A.) with 1 abstention (Jim I.), and no one against the motion.

Michael A. asked whether the First Selectman's office can get the information requested from HR within the next few days, knowing that we are entering the holiday season. Colin M. noted that could be accomplished.

VI. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:35pm.