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By Lisa Vivar at 10:17 am, Nov 20, 2026

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF
THE KENT MEMORIAL LIBRARY COMMMISSION
November 17, 2026
7:00 PM
Suffield Town Hall Meeting Room
Hybrid Meeting

Chair Sparzo called the meeting to order at 6:58 p.m., and commissioners recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Present: Michael Alexopoulos, Julie Bodnar, Ray Dalrymple, Claire Kawalec, Nina Kendrick, Aaron Marcavitch (Zoom), David Sylvestre, Christine Sinopoli, Greg Sparzo, Fred Sweitzer, Despina Tartsinis

Absent: Denise Boutin

Also present: Library Director Amy Vessella, Associate Library Director Liz Bologna

COMMISSIONER OPENING COMMENTS
none

PUBLIC COMMENT
Tess McCool (Suffield resident) expressed concerns over the collection balance report. She questioned how categories and various titles were classified by AI. She was bothered by how the report went from analysis to accusation (the library's "favoritism of liberal viewpoints" and "suppression of conservative viewpoints"). She urged commissioners to distinguish data from opinion and rely on the library director's professional qualifications.

Commissioner Sylvestre asked Ms. McCool several follow-up questions. During this exchange Commissioner Sweitzer called a POINT OF ORDER, stating that this is a time of public comment and not the place for back and forth discussion.

John Gracey stated that people in the public can make comments during this time while commissioners can comment during the rest of the meeting.

Suzanne Irwin stated that the public is allowed to make comments, and mentioned that the Board of Selectmen refuses to make comments during this period.

Commissioner Sinopoli stated that commissioners have liberty to ask questions and are not obligated to answer questions. She suggested that commissioners discuss "Public Comment" on January's agenda.

Commissioner Tartsinis stated that commissioners have the right to speak as members of the public, but according to Robert's Rules of Order it is not supposed to be a dialogue.

Approval of the minutes from the October 13, 2026 Regular Meeting of the Kent Memorial Library Commission

Commissioner Dalrymple MOVED to approve the minutes from the October 13, 2026 regular meeting of the Kent Memorial Library Commission. Commissioner Sinopoli SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS

none

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

Director Vessella presented her report, which included more detailed information about programs. This took the staff 6 cumulative hours to compile the extra requested data. Director Vessella commented about increased incidents at the library with middle school behavior problems, mentioning a lack of respect for authority of police officers in addition to library staff. She formally requested that the KMLC Policy Subcommittee hold a meeting to update the policy about unattended children to age 14. Director Vessella said she and her staff will implement a zero tolerance policy for misbehavior. Commissioners discussed this and agreed that police should be called if a misbehaving student is told to leave but does not, as this would be considered trespassing.

Commissioner Sweitzer inquired about the additional program information included in the director's report, and he drew attention to the number of additional work hours this places on the staff. After some discussion, there was a general consensus that moving forward including program titles and attendance would be sufficient.

REPORTS OF STANDING SUBCOMMITTEES

Commissioner Dalrymple stated that the Finance Subcommittee will meet in December.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Further discussion on balance of the collection:
Chair Sparzo commented that Commissioner Kendrick's report at the last meeting was meant to be the beginning of a dialogue. Commissioner Sweitzer read his statement which is summarized as follows: Commissioner Sweitzer cautioned against interpreting data as evidence of intentional favoritism toward liberal views or suppression of conservative ones. He believes concerns about the collection have generated strong opinions but have not yet been examined through a systematic, objective process. He recommends that the commission rely on the expertise of the Library Director and librarians, while giving commissioners and the public an opportunity to share their opinions.

The commission discussed its responsibility for overseeing the library, with some members arguing that relying exclusively on the Library Director for collection management would neglect its governing role. Commissioners also debated the use of AI to evaluate the collection, noting

the fact that AI can be used very effectively and others drawing attention to potential biases in large language models. An analysis using multiple AI platforms found a 5–10% lean toward traditionally liberal viewpoints. Potential next steps included reviewing individual books or identifying additional titles to broaden the collection.

Director Vessella and Associate Director Bologna handed out packets to each commissioner. Director Vessella read her document "What Does Balance Mean in a Library Collection?" in which she: defined "balance," "neutrality," and "intellectual diversity;" explored questions about whether perfect balance is possible and how the collection should be evaluated; concluded that "we can continually strive to maintain a collection that is broad in scope, responsive to community interests, and open to a range of ideas, viewpoints, and perspectives."

Commissioner Dalrymple shared some of his findings: in analyzing the raw data for two of the questions on the community needs survey which dealt with frequency of library use, he found that of the comments with polarising viewpoints, those mentioning that the library is "too liberal," has a "leftist view," and has "inappropriate content for children," constituted 86% of those comments versus those mentioning "LGBTQ support," "no book bans," and "governing Republicans" constituted 14%. He concluded that this should give the library a clue about balance.

Director Vessella commented on possible action items in response to survey data including: additional programming and adding more topics to the collection to meet community requests. Director Vessella also commented on conversations that she has had with community members, in which they discussed the fact that conservative community members may feel alienated from the library. This can create a cycle in which they do not visit or check out conservative materials, resulting in fewer such materials being purchased. If gaps in the collection are identified and materials are purchased, people need to use those materials or they may be weeded.

NEW BUSINESS

Schedule of meetings for 2027

Commissioner Tartsinis MOVED to set meetings for the 2027 calendar and include January of 2028 as follows: January 12, 2027; February 9, 2027; March 9, 2027; April 13, 2027; May 11, 2027; June 15, 2027; September 14, 2027; October 12, 2027; November 9, 2027; and January 11, 2028. Commissioner Sinopoli SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

John Gracey commented on middle schoolers' behavior, stating that parents should be involved and police should be called when necessary.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Tartsinis MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 9:17 p.m. Commissioner Kawalec SECONDED. Motion PASSED unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Nina Kendrick
11/20/26