

*Agency of Administration*

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| **State of Vermont** |  |
| **Department of Libraries**60 Washington Street |  |  |
| Barre, VT 05641 |  |  |

# VERMONT BOARD OF LIBRARIES

**MINUTES**

**October 12, 2021**

 **10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

**Meeting conducted Virtually via Microsoft Teams & In-Person at Department of Libraries, 60 Washington Street, Barre**

**In Attendance:** Bruce Post (Chair), Tom Frank, Maxie Ewins, Linda Saarnijoki, Adriene Katz, James Saunders, Tom McMurdo (Secretary)

**Others Present:** Janette Shaffer (VTLIB), April Shaw (VTLIB), Joshua Muse (VTLIB), Joy Worland (VTLIB), Jennie Runyon (USGS), Mike Lance (petitioner), Elizabeth Dow (Hardwick Selectboard and Historical Society)

**Call to Order:** Chair Bruce Post called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

**Review of Meeting Minutes:** Bruce Postbrought for discussion updates to previous draft minutes:

* January 12, 2021 - Tom Frankmoved to approve the draft minutes with one correction, which was seconded by Linda Saarnijoki. Approval was unanimous.
* April 13, 2021 - The board discussed the draft minutes. Linda suggested correcting a minor typo. Linda moved to approve the minutes, which was seconded by James Saunders. Approval was unanimous.
* June 17, 2021 - Bruce noted that the online version needed to have changes accepted. Bruce suggested one change where a comment was attributed to the wrong speaker. Linda suggested correcting a minor typo. Linda moved to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Tom F. Approval was unanimous.
* July 13, 2021 – No suggested changes. Linda moved to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Tom F. Approval was unanimous.
* August 25, 2021 – No suggested changes. Linda moved to approve the minutes, which was seconded by James. Approval was unanimous.

Linda thanked Bruce and Joshua Muse for their work getting the minutes updated.

**Proposal to Name Buffalo Mountain:** Maxie Ewins moved to open a public hearing on the proposal to name Buffalo Mountain in Hardwick, Vermont, which was seconded by James. Approval was unanimous.

Mike Lance (petitioner) and Elizabeth Dow (Hardwick Selectboard member and president of the Hardwick Historical Society) introduced themselves. Mike explained this was a request to formally recognize a name with a long history: Buffalo Mountain’s name and significance to Hardwick runs back at least to the late 1800s. Despite appearing in a number of official state and federal documents, the name had not made it into the official record. He stated that the mountain continues to have a central role in the town, and its name is referenced frequently. He also pointed out that the nearby Woodbury Mountain was sometimes mistakenly referred to as Buffalo Mountain, so he was hoping that official recognition could provide some clarification. Mike pointed out that he was coming with the support of the Select Board, Historical Society, East Hardwick Neighborhood organization, and over 100 signatories.

Mike explained he had was in touch with Chief Don Stevens of the Nulhegan Abenaki tribe, who said that he had no issue with the name, though he did share the Abenaki word for Buffalo (“Psiko”). Elizabeth Dow explained that in the 19th century, Buffalo Mountain was referred interchangeably as Buffalo Hill or Mountain, but by the modern day the name had firmly settled as Buffalo Mountain.

Linda asked if there were any objections to the change. Mike theorized that the only people who might object would be those who refer to Woodbury Mountain as Buffalo Mountain. James asked about Chief Steven’s reference to the buffalo name, and asked if it might be incorporated into the official name somehow. Jennie Runyon (from USGS) clarified that Chief Stevens was saying Psiko was the Abenaki word for Buffalo, but not that it had any connection to the mountain itself; thus it wouldn’t fit the criteria of a variant or alternate name, but it could be included in the write-up and description. Mike also mentioned that George Larrabee (a Tribal Council Member of the Abenaki Clan of the Hawk) said that he didn’t believe that the Abenaki had a name for the mountain.

James asks if the petitioners know of a reason for the name, and Mike suggests that (like Woodbury Mountain) it could be because it looks like the back of a buffalo from a certain view.

Maxie moved to close the public hearing, which was seconded by Linda. Approval was unanimous. Linda moved to approve the petition of naming the geographic feature in Hardwick as Buffalo Mountain, which was seconded by James. Maxie suggested that they use the phrase “officially name.” Approval was unanimous. Jennie Runyon from USGS explained the next steps that will happen at the Federal level. She went on to explain that in some cases where it seems that location names were officially missed, but do appear in other authoritative documents, and are otherwise straightforward, it may be possible to bring them directly to the USGS for consideration.

Linda suggested that going forward for petitions, it would be helpful to better highlight the relevant geographic feature on maps that appear in the supporting materials for the Board.

**Discussions of the Next State Librarian:** Bruce shared that they received 20 applications for the position from across the country. He and Tom Frank worked with Susanne Young (Secretary of Administration) to share feedback on the applicants. Bruce reminded folks that decisions are made by the Secretary of Administration, in consultation with the Board. He was hopeful there would be action on a new state librarian relatively soon, though pointed out that that this could be impacted by Susanne Young’s retirement in November.

**Report by the State Librarian:** Tom McMurdo summarized his recent report to the board. He said it was an honor to work with Susanne Young, who has had a remarkable career with the state. He also mentioned that both the Department and the Board will be in good hands with Kristin Clouser, the Deputy Secretary of Administration.

Tom McMurdo described the recent staffing changes at the department, including State Librarian Jason Broughton, Executive Assistant Cherie Yaeger, and Contracts and Grants Administrator Susan Whitney. Consultant for Library Governance Lara Keenan also move on to a new position several months ago. Additionally, Linda Bullard, who handled distribution of state documents amongst other duties, will be retiring in December. Tom M mentioned we are currently in the midst of several searches, and that a number of staff have been willing to take on additional duties in the intervening time.

Maxie pointed out that having staff successfully take on other people’s duties can sometimes give the impression that those other staff aren’t needed when budgets are determined. Tom McMurdo agreed that this is a great point, but that the department finds itself in a very busy part of the calendar, and further that an end is visible with the current job searches. He admitted that the current situation is not sustainable indefinitely. Janette agreed with that perspective, and described the current situation as maintenance mode, where it’s not possible to take on any additional large projects. The current roles are also creating redundancies, where staff are getting insight into processes they haven’t previously been involved in. Linda recognized that as a useful way to improve support and collaboration within the department, and suggested it was important to focus on the temporary nature of the situation, and to maybe go as far as tracking what isn’t being done. Bruce asked whether it would be possible to hold off on the executive assistant position until a State Librarian was in place, but Tom M explained that they considered it but didn’t feel they could be without someone in that position for a longer period.

Tom McMurdo described the origin of the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont, from Senator Hardy’s bill. The first organizational meeting occurred on September 17, 2021. He explained that each meeting focuses on a separate topic (programming is the next topic), and testimony will be accepted from the community. The Working Group is an eleven-member group, and nine members have been assigned, while two more will be assigned by the president of the Vermont School Library Association (VSLA).

Tom M described this as a golden opportunity, and that he believes the last time something similar was undertaken was 1970. It’s a great chance to take a snapshot, focus on where we are, identify issues that need to be addresses, and consider possible policy ideas to suggest to the legislature in 2023. Tom Frank suggested the importance of having members from outside of Chittenden County. Tom M pointed out that everyone has the opportunity to be part of the process, and that anyone can submit testimony. Adriene expressed a hope that the department could better publicize the group and its proceedings. Bruce pointed out that the library data they see every year includes a lot of numbers, but not that much meaning, and he’s hopeful that the study group will be more valuable.

Tom McMurdo stated that the department is close to distributing nearly a million dollars in ARPA grants to public libraries, which will appear in the next report. He also referenced the library status survey, which tracks libraries open status and services during the pandemic, and added masking requirements in July. Tom M pointed out the big change in masking requirement percentages between then and now. He also mentioned a recent webinar about Building Ventilation for libraries led by UVM professor Yves Dubief, which has a recorded version available on the department website.

Next, Tom McMurdo spoke about the Vermont Public Library Foundation (VPLF), which was created in the early to mid-2000s. It was a means to accept gifts to the department, and special funds that weren’t part of the state budgeting process. He believes it was the mechanism for distributing the Gates Foundation funds around 2010 for FiberConnect. In later years, it was used to fund a variety of projects, as well as distributing money after Hurricane Irene. Tom M said that recent state librarians had noted the VPLF’s somewhat odd nature, in that it is solely managed by the State Librarian and the Board of VPLF (not the Board of Libraries) but is otherwise outside of the Department. Tom M said that former State Librarian Scott Murphy felt there were potential liabilities to the VPLF, and that it could be used to skirt some state regulations about spending money – not illegally, and probably not improperly, but that it could be used in a way that could create an unnecessary liability for the Department and State Librarian. The signature power (for the VPLF) is in the process of being transferred from Cherie Yaeger and Jason Broughton to Janette Shaffer and Tom McMurdo.

Bruce said that he’d heard talk of the VPLF off and on, and pointed out that the VPLF Board was not the same as the Board of Libraries, and could include anyone. He said that while Jason was State Librarian, Maxie, Deb Granquist, and he had offered to serve on the Board, but that that had never moved forward. Bruce mentioned hearing that it had a large amount of money at one point, but that he thought it had roughly $300,000 currently (which Tom McMurdo confirmed). He said that the Board of VPLF should come together sometime soon and figured these things out. Bruce was glad that the whole Board of Libraries was hearing about it, though the Board itself doesn’t have jurisdiction over it.

Tom McMurdo agreed with Bruce’s comments and said that one of his major goals was to get the Department inline with state regulations and processes, and that having a separate fund set aside for a commissioner is not a common practice. If someone were to give us a gift or a grant, he would much prefer it went through regular state processes. To his knowledge, there may not have been enough transparency and scrutiny – though there are a large number of records. Tom M agreed that a meeting is in order once they receive signatory power over the fund. Maxie added that there was a similar situation when she was at the Fletcher Free Library, and that they ultimately folded the fund back into the city because it was problematic.

Bruce brought up the future membership of the board. Bruce and Deb’s final terms end in 2022, and wanted the board to think about potential new board members. Appointments are made by the Governor, and there is an office of Boards and Commissions where board openings are advertised. Bruce said that he wasn’t sure how much attention that received, so word of mouth is important. He and Deb can continue to serve until an appointment is made. The next Board meeting is the organizational meeting of the Board, where a Chair and Vice Chair are named. Bruce brought up geographic diversity on the board, and that virtual meetings (as long as that continues to be a thing) make it easier to participate from further parts of the state.

Linda asked whether the Board is looking for trustees or librarians. Tom McMurdo said he thinks its nice to have a mix of librarians and non-librarians on the board, especially around geographic naming, and the Department will definitely get the word out. Bruce felt that having a Board of entirely librarians would be a mistake, as it leaves out trustees and users. Maxie asked whether it would be possible to include legislators? She also agreed that we could branch out of solely librarians and trustees. Linda suggested that since libraries are increasingly being seen as community centers, a community activist or even selectboard member might be a potential for the Board. Tom Frank agreed, pointing out that a selectboard member or school librarian from southern Vermont might be a good addition. He also pointed out with Karen Gravlin in the Inclusive Services (formerly Special Populations) Consultant position, it might be worthwhile to find someone who works underserved groups.

Bruce mentioned that the next meeting is Tuesday, January 11, 2022. Tom Frank moved to adjourn the meeting, which James seconded. Approval was unanimous.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 12:03 pm.