

## **Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont**

Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, March 25, from 10 am-12 pm, and 2-4 pm

Working Group members present: Catherine Delneo, Maria Avery, Meg Allison, Kelly McCagg, Andy Kolovos, Jeannette Bair, Susan O'Connell, Wendy Sharkey, Karen McCalla, Denise Hersey

Testimonials: Jennie Rozycki, Amy Grasmick, Emily DiGiulio, Dana Hart, Bree Drapa, Lisa Sammet, Scott Miller, Barbara Ball, Peter Money, Carrie Watson

VTLIB staff members: April Shaw, Josh Muse, Janette Shaffer, Joy Worland, Tom McMurdo

Meeting called to order at 10:05 am.

### **Working Group Business**

Catherine Delneo expresses her appreciation for Tom McMurdo, and of his efforts with the working group while interim state librarian.

Catherine asks for suggestions on the minutes for the January 14, 2022 meeting. Kelly McCagg moved to accept the minutes, and Wendy Sharkey seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. Catherine also reminded the group that in addition to the live testimony, written testimony can be submitted, and that it will be posted to the group's website. Moving forward, we will be posting the testimony in advance of the meeting.

Jeannette Bair asks who would be writing the ultimate recommendations of the working group, and when that would be happening. She has concerns that if we wait till the end of the process, it may be challenging to remember the early testimony. Catherine said that was an important point, but asked to hold off until later in the meeting to discuss.

Catherine mentions open meeting law, and the potential ramifications for the working group in terms of communications and shared editing of documents.

### **Testimony**

13:53

**Jennie Rozycki** - Director at John G McCullough Free Library, North Bennington

Jennie says that she has learned a lot about facilities in the last year or two. She thinks that the spirit of the library is often hemmed in by very physical, tangible realities, which can affect our ability to serve our communities. The McCullough saw a surge in visitors pre-pandemic, and a lot of increased activity. This growth put a real strain on what she would discover is a very fragile historic building, such as the pipes, plumbing, and heating system. The various systems had not been had not really been maintained, except for emergency repairs: when the 60-year-old furnace broke, we had to hurry to replace everything in the system; when the basement

flooded, and it was a huge problem, she was told this happened every couple of years, yet nothing had been done. More visitors also meant more use of the restrooms, which were very out of date. The wiring was likewise out of date.

Jennie explains that they are currently in the midst of construction, building accessible restrooms, adding new wiring and plumbing, wired smoke detectors, installing an HVAC system with better air quality, and offering more energy efficiency. They are looking at fundamental questions of safety and access, and balancing the use of a historic space.

Jennie is now looking at the second phase, which will build an addition for an elevator on the back of the building, and funding is once again the main roadblock. She also adds that, although it isn't exactly facilities, they also struggle with furnishings. The children's room especially is just a hodgepodge of military and school surplus and random items, and doesn't create the best atmosphere for our youngest populations. There is a lot of goodwill for improvements, but we still run into challenges on funding.

Kelly McCagg asks what the response was when she asked why things weren't repaired over time. Jennie said that the intention was to "ride the furnace as long as possible", and there were more acute financial needs.

Wendy Sharkey says that she had to learn a lot about facilities, and asks if there had been something that would have helped? Jennie thinks that a class on "care and feeding of older buildings" in Library school would have been great. She thinks that going forward, a consultant on construction and building would also be a great addition.

Meg Allison asks about money spent on the first phase. Jennie explained that it came from ARPA funds through the municipality. They asked for a total of \$151,000, which is more than the annual budget. This allowed for a comprehensive approach to the whole HVAC system, which wouldn't otherwise be possible.

Andy Kolovos asks if the Preservation Trust or Department of Historic Preservation offers or has offered a program specifically to libraries. Jennie said that she believes that the Preservation Trust has offered just such a program, and that some of her trustees had attended.

Kelly asks about the budget and staffing at McCullough. Jennie says it's under 150k, and they have a staff of 5 with Jennie as the only full time staff member.

Catherine asks beyond consulting and other programs, if there is anything else that the Department could do to help. Jennie points out as an aside that they receive funding from 3 different municipalities. Ultimately, she feels that funding ends up being the biggest issue. The current project costs around \$340,000, while the next phase will be around \$800,000.

Susan asks if there was something specific that could be built into libraries. In the same way that standards required a degree or PLC for the director, is there something that could be built

in for facilities requirements. Jennie said that requirement might be just one more thing a library isn't able to meet. She suggests that maybe requiring a plan, rather than meeting a facility requirement might be a better solution.

**Amy Grasmick** – Director at Kimball Public Library, Randolph

Amy says that she has been the director for 20+ years. Kimball serves 2 towns (Randolph and Braintree), with a service population of about 6,000. The total budget is \$340,000, and there are just over 3 FTE, with 3 professional staff and 3 paras. She says that folks who know her will be aware that she has a great fondness for *Palaces for the People* by Erik Kleinenberg. COVID has, if anything, pointed out how vital social infrastructure is for the well being of a community. Social infrastructure is made up of places like parks, schools, restaurants, community centers – and libraries – where people can meet and interact.

Amy is delighted to say that Kimball will finally be reopening on April 1. Because the building doesn't have physical ventilation, once the weather got cold and we had to close windows, we closed the building and moved to low and no contact models. But she says that what people really want is to be in the building. This is clearly a temporary, and weather dependent fix. We are on the hunt for an HVAC system that will provide sufficient air exchange and be energy efficient. This project is estimated to be \$80,000. Another project in the next couple of years involves a hole in the roof (copper cladding of a cupola) – fixing this and the active leak is expected to be over \$200,000. Thanks to a little chipmunk, we also discovered a hole in the foundation that will need repair soon.

She explains that these are the pressing needs for a 120-year-old building that's on the National Register. We have a responsibility to maintain the building as well as making it accessible and usable.

Amy explains that she's overseen numerous construction projects in her career, everything from renovating a team room to updating an accessible restroom, as well as sprinklers, insulation, lighting, carpeting, drainage and foundation, to a wheelchair lift and boiler. And as Jennie said, they don't teach you this in library school. She's managed more than half a million dollars in capital projects on the Kimball. Funding is always challenging. She appreciates the grants through BGS and the USDA, but that still leaves about half the costs for the trustees to figure out. Amy says that as a municipal library, it's an ongoing battle with the select board, who is reluctant to recognize the responsibility that the taxpayers have to maintain the building.

Amy also mentions that in a female-dominated profession like libraries, working with a male-dominated profession can result in an element of sexism while trying to manage these projects. She is grateful that she was able to audit a construction management class at Vermont Technical College, which gave her better tools for how to communicate, to understand, and how to negotiate with projects like this.

Jeannette Bair asks for more info about this potential position. Catherine explains that the governor's budget includes a request for \$15 million in ARPA funds for physical improvements at libraries. The funding is specifically intended to allow users to access the internet, so the intention is support and improve the ability of people to get into and use the buildings. The request also includes \$900,000 for two limited duration positions – one on the administrative side, and the second in a project manager/consultant type role. Catherine says that the department separately requested \$10 million in congressionally directed spending through Patrick Leahy's office. Neither of these are a sure thing, but the capital bill continues to move through the House and Senate, and is still looking promising. We were so appreciative to the Governor for his support of both funding possibilities.

Meg Allison wants to express her appreciation to Amy for being willing to name the sexism that she's encountered while working through renovation projects. Thank you for the courage in naming it. It's a hurdle that we face in female-dominated fields, and naming it is the first step before we can go towards helping to eradicate it.

Catherine Delneo asks if Amy can describe ways (besides being closed) that the building's condition limits or impacts library service. Amy explains that they are fortunate that it was built as a library, so it has a fairly open floor plan. But the main floor was the only one intended for public use. The basement is now the youth service department, and it is a bit less flexible. Amy explains that there are things they will never be able to do in the building, such as offering a community room – the only spaces that would be big enough for meeting or presentations are also the spaces that have computers and house collections, and so there's an unmet need for community meeting space.

Amy elaborates that the building is constrained on its site, and so there's no real way to expand it. She hates to say it, but the building is becoming sort of an artifact that is too constrained to meet the full needs of the community, for example with meeting space. With an additional space in an annex it might be possible to separate our Youth Services into an integrated youth center. That would allow us to repurpose the space that is currently used for youth space, but that's extremely aspirational.

#### **Emily DiGiulio - Fairfax Community Library**

Emily explains that she is the director at the Fairfax Community Library, which is a combined public and school library. They serve a population of just over 5,000, with over 800 students in the Pre-K to Grade 12 school. I work with two public library colleagues, as well as the school librarian, and we share the space during the school day. She says that the community is very supportive of the library, and that the model has been in place for over 50 years.

Emily says that she sees the library meeting the needs of many users in many ways. One big recent improvement has been the addition of an open WiFi hotspot in the parking lot, which has allowed community members to access the internet while the building is closed if they don't have access at home. The library has a large open floor plan for community members and

students, which is where much of our programming takes place. We also have a separate conference room, which is used by the school and public for various meetings and events. Emily explains that they have struggled to provide adequate programming and meeting space for the community which is separate and large enough, without interfering with classes or other library events.

Emily explains that there is an ongoing discussion about the facility in its current form. Some users are glad to be here during the school day, because it gives them a better sense and more connection with the school community. Other users suggest that it would be nice to have a separate facility that was just a public library, though so far those voices have not been as loud. In general, I feel we are providing a physical environment that is welcoming and safe for the community.

Over the years there have been a couple of opportunities for capital improvements, but they have been part of bonds to improve the school building, and neither of them passed.

Catherine thanks Emily for presenting her situation, and talking about the dynamics around a community library. She asks Emily if she could speak to the experience at other community libraries in the state.

Emily says that the structure can be very specific to the individual library. Her impression is that in at least one case there are specific days for the school to use the space, and other days when it is open to the community. At her library, they open the public in the morning, go throughout the school day, and then into the late afternoon or evening (depending on the day). They also have Saturday hours when the school is closed. In terms of space they have a small office/workroom areas near the circulation desk, which are also available for classes or patrons. They are limited as to what programs they can hold during the school day. They do have one story time a week at a time when there are no classes.

Emily explains that there are also security implications which have changed over the years. There are locked doors into the library, and from the library into the school, and with doorbells to be let through.

She also describes their collection: They have an adult fiction collection, a non-fiction collection that is combined adult and youth, and a youth collection that includes YA, juvenile, and picture books, which is primarily a school collection.

Jeannette Bair asks how the shared space affects facility costs in her budget? Emily explains that they do pay a small portion of building maintenance and phone service, but that most of the cost (including things like heating and light) is taken on by the school. Overall, though the arrangement means that the town saves considerable money.

Susan O'Connell mentions that it seems like some community libraries in VT have been moving away from the model, but that it seems to be generally working well in Fairfax. She wondered if Emily had any words of wisdom as to why it's working well in Fairfax. Emily says that she's not

sure she has any words of wisdom, but she thinks one of the big things is that they offer a significant number of hours for the public, and that seems to work for folks. There are also a lot of longtime residents who feel connected with the school and the library together.

Emily also suggests that they have a really nice working relationship with school library staff and the school itself. They feel very supported, and there has never been a question of whether the public library is welcome as part of the school library and school community.

Susan asks if there is a lot of discussion about the cost savings and the relative costs of a separate building. Emily explains that there hasn't been that much so far, but that it could be a good discussion to have.

Wendy Sharkey asks how transient the population is, and whether a lot of consistent long-term residents could explain why people are used to the system and happy to continue. Emily says she doesn't have exact figures, but while there is a large stable population, Fairfax is one of the fastest growing towns in Franklin County, and so they have a number of new residents, but so far that hasn't impacted the combined model.

**Dana Hart** – Director at Ilsley Public Library, Middlebury

Dana explains that she has been at the library for about four years. They have around 8,000 residents, and a budget of \$750,000. In a lot of ways they are pretty lucky, but their facilities are at the breaking point and starting to fail. Ilsley has about 18,000 square feet spread over the original building (from 1924) and two additions (in 1977 and 1988). The library also has a branch library in East Middlebury called Sarah Patridge, as well as a tenant on our third floor (Middlebury Community Television), though they are more of a partner than a tenant. She says that she has gone into detail in her written testimony, but that the aspiration for the building is that it is safe, accessible to everyone in the community, energy efficient, sustainable, and flexible – but they don't have that right now.

What are they struggling with? As is true for many libraries, on the one hand there's the services we provide, which are vital and ample and matter a great deal to the community; and then there's the building we're in, which kind of holds us back and doesn't allow us to expand or meet the needs of the community. And then there's the funding that would be required to get us into a building that met those needs.

Dana described that they did a feasibility study 4 years ago, and found that it would cost about \$10 million to do a major renovation and expansion on the library's current footprint. This would get them up to 26,000 square feet, which is what a comprehensive building and program analysis said they would need. But \$10 million is a staggering amount of course. Middlebury supports the library well with a robust operating budget, and there is great support, but a \$10 million bond is just not a possibility.

Fundraising is certainly something we will do, but still getting to that number would be really difficult. Dana thinks there's a real gap in a lot of libraries between the services provided and

the buildings that are occupied, and when she tries to make the equation work, it seems like there's just no way to get the funding from the local community alone. Funding from the state and federal level would go along way towards closing that gap.

Kelly McCagg thanks Dana for her detailed written testimony specific to public libraries (like sightlines). She shares an example of a project she was involved in, where the team turned the shelving because it "looked better", totally ignoring sightlines and requiring big changes. Dana says that the bottom line is that libraries are expensive, and they have a huge number of requirements – sightlines, carrying heavy collections, ADA, flexibility. Everything needs to be handicapped accessible, and right now that's not a good situation.

Meg Allison wants to highlight "how can our library be welcoming to all if it isn't accessible to all". She wants to put this on the group's radar to think about funding for ADA accessibility. She also brings up questions of safety, including staff working into the evening hours, and that we don't want to wait for something to go really wrong before addressing this.

Dana also mentions that as a director she spends an enormous amount of time on facilities and upkeep. She finds herself often chasing problem to problem. She feels that some kind of comprehensive support (like a building inspector) to point out problems that will eventually come up would be incredibly helpful.

Jeannette Bair thinks that a consultant through VTLIB would be great, but also mentions that the preservation trust offers small grants to have an architect come to your building and review everything.

Kelly asks whether there is someone at the town Public Works who might be able to help with inspections? Dana explains that there is staff at the town who can help with projects, but it's not as day-to-day. Kelly says that they get inspected annually by someone at the town, which might be possible in some places.

#### **Bree Drapa** – Director at Westford Public Library

Bree explains that she's been the director for almost 10 years. She loves her building. There is much to love, but also much to do. It was built in 1844, predating the civil war, and built without electricity, plumbing, the internet, and automobiles. In fact, the front door sits in the right of way of VT Rt. 128. She describes how the building hosted town meetings, traveling performers, and even a half-court basketball court. It's served as overflow for the school next door, and some residents remember toasting marshmallows on the coal stove in the basement between lessons.

Bree goes on to say that it's been the libraries since the late 1970s, and been in its current configuration since the early 200s. It's one of the nicest buildings in Westford, and residents are proud of it.

Much like owning an old house, there's always something breaking or some ongoing project. Running an old library requires time for collections, budgeting, programming, but also repair and maintenance take up a large part of her time. She says that she has learned so much about plumbing, wiring, fire codes, crawlspaces, and preservation.

In the last 15 years, they've installed a heat pump, replaced a heating tank, installed energy efficient lighting, insulated, and put in a sump pump. They've also upgraded the porch, added a handicapped accessible ramp, redid the parking lot twice, and painted the exterior.

Bree says that three projects have been particularly impactful. The first was an insulation project, which cut the heating costs by 70%. Their lovely historic windows don't open, which means it would be stifling inside the building for staff and patrons, and so the heat pump has dramatically improved conditions in the summer. Thirdly, they installed a new handicapped ramp, which looks good and allows everyone to access the building. Though this project spurred them to look at other ways to make the building more accessible, and these are in their long-range plans.

Bree feels that they have three major challenges, all of which are fairly typical. The first is accessibility – we say that libraries are for everyone, but not everyone can get into everywhere at my library. The children's area is notably inaccessible, with four steps to get up and no ramp for those with mobility issues or strollers. Though the bathroom and entryway are technically compliant, from a practical perspective they leave something to be desired. Secondly, the building is just short on space. Bree explains that they do a lot of programming; summer reading programs and adult programs can just leave them out of space. And there aren't really any practical ways to expand except for up, which has its own issues in a historic building. The last challenge is water. The library is located on an old tannery, and the well is not drinkable, but at the same time they have the only public toilet in town. The library share an aging wastewater system with the town offices. The town is working to develop a community wastewater system, but if the current system fails they would have few options.

Bree says that she works 30 hours/week, with a 10 hours/week assistant who doesn't handle facilities. They lack the time, money, and expertise to handle the building projects that should be done. Writing grants, fundraising, permitting, project management, not to mention researching and talking to experts take up time that is just not available while trying to run a vibrant library. As Amy said, we don't have the expertise. We're not architects, engineers, or building maintenance folks – we're librarians. Bree also wanted to talk about the digital infrastructure, which also requires time and expertise that isn't available.

Bree answers the repeated question of how could the state help? Money is self-explanatory, but expertise is nearly as vital. Offering access to experts who are trained in preservation, accessibility, and construction, who have been vetted and understand libraries needs could make a real impact on the library community.

Susan O'Connell brought up the idea that came up during Dana's testimony of having a yearly inspection of the facilities. Bree isn't sure that it needs to be annual, but says that someone going around to many libraries on a regular basis could provide real support. She has been in the nooks and crannies of the building, but to have an expert just take a comprehensive look would be great. She also points out that if she were to leave, the institutional knowledge would not keep up.

Andy Kolovos asks if they are municipal or incorporated (they are municipal). He asks about whether there is potable water? Bree says that you can't drink the ground water, though they bring in delivery water.

The meeting is adjourned from 11:44 am to 2 pm

### **12:00 Recess until 2:00**

**Lisa Sammet** – Director at Jeudevine Library, Hardwick

Lisa explains that she's been the director at Jeudevine for almost 22 years, as well as working in other states previously. Upon starting she knew that they would have to address ADA – it's an old historical building, and you can't get inside with a wheelchair, and the bathroom is in the basement. You couldn't add a lift because there just isn't the space for it.

From the get-go, she knew she probably needed to put on an addition. But the library has been historically underfunded, so it took many years to get the budget increased and a Friends group started. It's a struggle to put together money and a team of people to work on this. You need a really engaged group to make fundraising work, and her board did not do fundraising previously. Though the Friends group did, you really need people who get out and schmooze and who know who to reach out to get money.

They received an Arts Council grant to help with an elevator, but that was going to cost \$1.69 million. They were lucky to receive a large donation which really helped. There were also some grants. But then during during COVID, the estimate went up to \$2.4 million, which is just an enormous difference. They were luckily one of 10 institutions to get directed legislative funding. So, they think they have enough, but they have to go out to bid once again.

The building is only 900 square feet, and we've come against its limits. It's hard to fit programming, the children and adult spaces are shared. Lisa thinks it would be an incredible investment in communities to support library construction by the state. Libraries are important cultural institutions, and it's hard for libraries to improve their buildings. Since Vermont doesn't do any other direct support to libraries, it would be well worth considering some kind of construction support.

Wendy Sharkey asks about the budget and population. Lisa says that the population is 2,800, and the budget is \$128,000. Wendy points out that's a huge difference between the \$2.4 million they are trying to raise.

Catherine Delneo asks if there is anything she would like to see at the state level. Lisa suggests a grant program specifically for facilities, and not limited to historical or ADA. Requiring a match would be useful, cause it shows buy-in from the community, and gives a sense of ownership, but overall it could really help assist these kind of projects.

Catherine also asked if there were services that she would like to provide which aren't possible in the current space. Lisa says that there is a basic comfort level that they can't provide. There is little space for computers, tables, or chairs. She would like to expand into non-traditional items, but there is nowhere to store them. There isn't a meeting room, so for programs we have to close the library and move everything around, and we can only fit about 12 adults. The addition will fit 80 people with a kitchen, for the community. We'll have a teen area, which is the only real teen-focused space in town. Before the pandemic, they'd have every seat in the building filled, with people on the floor. Lisa explains that they can't increase membership, and they can't increase usage – there are literally walls stopping you.

**Scott Miller** - UVM Howe Library

Scott explains that they share a lot of issues with public libraries, but at a larger scale. Funding is always an issue. Storage space is at a premium, and collections get moved to warehouses, which is not ideal. Proper environmental controls for the various media is also challenging.

Denise Hersey pointed out that Scott handles the facilities needs for all three library buildings on campus, which could easily take more people. They've wrestled with HVAC, and a consistent leak.

Scott points out that there is deferred maintenance for many facilities – life safety and ADA get funded, but not much else. They are looking into a freezer for some of their photographs, so they don't degrade any further than they already have. He suggests that the state provides funding for the school, but that rarely makes it to the library, and that direct state funding to the library would be really helpful.

Denise says that UVM is the flagship institution of the state, but that everyone in the college community is fighting for the same funding. They're reduced to being reactive, and not proactive around problems.

Maria Avery says that all of the same issues impact UVM: space is always an issue, whether literal space or making space usable.

Scott elaborates that he is the facility manager for the UVM libraries, which basically cover 230,000 square feet, including 3 main libraries, a research annex, special collections, and remote storage.

Catherine asks about whether a statewide preservation team would be helpful during emergencies (facilities or otherwise). Scott says that there have definitely been collaborative efforts that way. Having disaster kits available is helpful as well. But just having more

knowledge and preparation at the state level would give us the chance to better support each other.

Kelly McCagg asks about the facilities budget? Scott says that it is a moving target. There is no direct budget for facilities. Physical plant works on infrastructure issues, but it's not broken out for the library. Kelly also asks what the Provost says when they say they are the central collection in the state. Scott explains that in general they do have the necessary conditions for most of the collection, and they are willing to put some money into this aspect, but ultimately there are numerous other divisions who are also in dire need, so it's always an arduous battle.

**Barbara Ball** – Director at Windsor Public Library members

Barbara explains that Windsor has about 3,500 people, and the library has a \$116,000 budget. The building is from 1904, with 3,000 sq. ft. on the main floor in this beautiful historic building. In 2000 we built a ramp. The basement, which is only accessible with a flight of stairs, includes the children's room, meeting room, historical records room, and bathroom, which we've been struggling to improve for 20 years.

Barbara says that at one point there was a \$5 million dollar plan for a big expansion, but it never worked out. Lately they've been working on a much smaller goal to install an elevator and fix the bathroom. It would require giving up part of staff offices and the historical records room. It's not perfect, but it would be an improvement. For example, our front desk is staffed by volunteers, and some of our volunteers can't make it down to the bathroom. They had energy efficiency VT take a look, but their main suggestion was solar cells on a flat part of the roof.

Wendy Sharkey asks how they'll handle the loss of space in order to construct the elevator? Barbara says that it will involve some decisions to figure what to give up, and it means losing elbow room as well. Wendy asked if there was anything at the state level what would help? Barbara agreed that a construction consultant at the state would be helpful, as well as some amount of funding.

Susan O'Connell asks about the space, and whether they'll have more (or actually less) space after the project. Barbara says that the basement is in addition to the 3,000 square feet, though a bit of space will be lost to the elevator in exchange for improved accessibility. Overall, she says that it would be great if the bathroom and kids' section were not in the basement, and if there were more environmental control for some of the really old newspapers.

Meg Allison asks whether ARPA funds were considered for the project? Barbara said that some of the trustees were discussing with the town, and it might be a possibility.

**Peter Money** – Director at Mary L Blood Library, Brownsville

Peter explains that the Mary L Blood library is in a town of about 1,300 people, with some recent growth. As part of the new residents, there has been a lot of requests for more hours,

more technical support, more ebooks/audiobooks. They are in a small building, which is really a one-room schoolhouse type environment, and hasn't changed much in 122 years. Last year they improved the HVAC, added air conditioning, and created a meeting space, and there are now about six groups who regularly meet in this space. We also have a very small children's space.

Peter feels that they have more people in town who are looking for, for lack of a better phrase, "city library" resources. They are trying to get quickly up to speed where they can. They have joined GMLC/Listen Up Vermont, and are working to get on to Koha. They do have an attic space, but it would require an elevator. There's only one in or out of the building, which makes him mindful of high-risk patrons who may not be comfortable in the small space for long periods of time. There's a basement that might conceivably be used for storage. They have about half an acre that is owned by the town – we'd like to expand into the backyard, and maybe a bit to the south towards Mount Ascutney. It could be a great space both indoors and outdoors. They are also trying to collaborate with a lot of other groups in town.

Kelly McCagg asks if the long-time residents have any objections to the modernization of the library. Peter says that it is his instinct that some people are really attached to the sense of history that the space has, and he is sympathetic to that. While others want to be able to do all of the modern things - new fiction, ebooks, audiobooks, streaming, WiFi.

The town is only a recent official "owner" of the library (about 3 years), but they are trying to increase buy-in. For example, they received new furniture, and there has been some division on how people feel about it.

Susan O'Connell asks if West Windsor is a separate town? Peter says that it is a separate municipality. Brownsville is the village in West Windsor. Susan asks about where the library stands in terms of maintenance. Peter says that it's a small town, with a small selectboard, and that governance is on a very personal level. Goals like getting a single custodian for all of the town buildings are a work in progress. Much of the maintenance has been grant-funded. There's some planning happening, but for now things are pretty ad-hoc. The town has oversight, and there is good communication.

Peter adds that though they are relatively small and not close to a major town. He thinks the town will need more of a creative economy to maintain activity. He hopes that they can expand the paid staff a bit as well, as he feels that VT libraries in general may rely on volunteers a bit more than they should.

**Carrie Watson** – Director at Varnum Library, Jeffersonville, VT

Carrie explains that she has been at the Varnum Library for about 7 months. It's located in the village of Jeffersonville, in the Town of Cambridge. In 1938, when the building was built, there was a population of 1,300; now there is a population of 3,800. She says that the building is beautiful, but it is only 1400 sq. ft., and trying to meet a growing community with growing

needs is a real challenge. COVID has really illustrated the dire need for broadband in rural areas, which makes our WiFi crucial. There are also only 2 public bathrooms in town, and during the summer we'll see a line out the door from bike tours. The library is owned and operated by the crescendo club, with some funding support from the town. The town support increased this year, but our annual budget is \$118,000.

Carrie explains that they serve not just Cambridge, but also Belvidere and Fletcher (which have no libraries) and Waterville (which has a small volunteer-run library). And so a lot of people who need the internet come to the Varnum.

Carrie says that the biggest needs are computers, technology, and spaces to gather. There is really no indoor space for people to gather in the community. Providing a space to meet safely and regularly is part of our vision.

Catherine Delneo asks if Carrie saw anything at the state level in Kentucky that might be helpful here in Vermont? Carrie was surprised that there were things besides municipal libs, and accordingly was also surprised that there wasn't more consistent support in every town. She felt the municipal libraries might have some advantages, depending on the town. Her overriding sense is the absolute need for community support and social support. People need a space to work, and an access point for community services. Their community doesn't have a boys and girls club, they just have a library.

Carrie mentions that she just had someone from the Department of Labor ask if they could start holding job coaching sessions at the library, and she said of course "Yes" but also "How are going to fit this?" They have two rooms that are available to the public and house the entirety of the collection.

Catherine asks if there is anything that the state could provide or help with to assist? Carrie said that she couldn't answer super knowledgeably. Her suggestion was to give some advice to incorporated libraries who might explore becoming municipal.

### **Public Comment**

Jeannette Bair says that the library building in Rochester is actually deeded to the Trustee, who are elected. But the town uses that as a justification for not financially supporting the building. Accordingly, she thinks there may be some ambiguous models out there among libraries regarding who exactly owns the building, and what the relationship is with the town.

Tom McMurdo responds that there can often be a struggle for directors to get what they need, and sometimes organizations/towns try to defer those needs, especially when balanced against the police, or the fire department.

Karen McCalla says in the chat "For school libraries, many folks find that they don't have enough space, but they are also at the mercy of the school district for their space. They can't

pursue grant funding without district support, and libraries/library space/funding are often lower on the priority list for many districts.”

Meg Allison highlights the written testimony from school librarians. She pointed out that the spaces she’s worked in had been last renovated 20 and 25 years ago – which seems recent, but is obviously totally out of date technologically. Libraries are pivoting from quiet research to being a space where students can make and learn, and the facilities may not support that. Meg suggests there could be some kind of base minimum for school libraries that might compel local districts to invest.

Karen says that a building consultant would even be helpful for school libraries - someone with specific experience with library spaces who can provide advice. Her facility director often doesn't believe her when she tells him about specific library needs, if they conflict with how he thinks the building should work.

Susan O’Connell didn’t think she had anything to say, because the building is fairly modern and they had a recent renovation. In many ways they are in wonderful shape. But the idea of long-term maintenance is an important one. As an incorporated library, every budget includes what they would like to do, and then they cut everything that they don’t need – which often becomes maintenance. She suggests that having a professional voice to come in and help, but to also share their advice with boards as a knowledgeable figure, could be exceedingly helpful.

#### Written Testimony:

- Amy Grasmick from Kimball Public Library
- Amy Young from Berlin Elementary School Library
- Barbara Ball from Windsor Public Library
- Bree Drapa from Westford Public Library
- Bridget Carbonetti from Irasburg Village School Library
- Carrie Watson from Varnum Memorial Library
- Catherine Goldsmith from Starksboro Public Library
- Cheryl Doubleday from Bradford Public Library
- Dana Hart from Ilsley Public Library
- Emily DiGiulio from Fairfax Community Library
- Emily Zollo from Latham Library
- Jennie Rozycki from John G. McCullough Free Library
- Jill Abair from U32 School Library
- Joe Bertelloni from Tinmouth Elementary School Library
- Kendra Aber-Ferri from Morrystown Centennial Library
- Linda Saarnijoki from Wilder Memorial Library
- Lisa Sammet from Jeudevine Memorial Library
- Maureen Badger from Dailey Memorial Library

- Peter Langella from Champlain Valley High School Library
- Peter Money from Mary L. Blood Memorial Library
- Randal Smathers from Rutland Free Library
- Scott Miller from UVM Howe Library

### **Administrative Discussion**

Catherine Delneo asks about a date for the next meeting, possibly May 20 or May 27. After some discussion, the group settles on May 20, and plans to keep the 2 hour/2 hour split format. She also asks about the approach moving forward, and the consensus was that the virtual option should be maintained. Catherine also asked about an option for an in-person participant, which the group agreed would be a good thing to try.

Kelly McCagg suggested moving the schedule to 9-11 am and 1-3 pm. After a vote, it was decided to try it for next meeting.

Catherine asked about scheduling the July meeting as well. After discussion, the group settled on Friday, July 29.

There is a discussion about Open Meeting Law, and the limitations on small meetings and shared documents. Kelly suggests that with ARSL, they would add comments to shared documents, and then discuss all of the points at the next meeting.

Wendy Sharkey points out that with collective editing, it's important to have an initial document, otherwise it can be really challenging to make any progress.

Jeannette Bair suggests that the group could try decreasing the time for testimony, and reserve the second half of the meeting to create the initial document on the topic.

Kelly expresses that if working in shared documents is off the table, it makes completing the huge task in a small amount of time even more challenging.

Susan asks if the working group is fully bound by open meeting law. Cathy suggests that her impression is that we are, but she will verify that.

After some discussion, the group decides to hold a purely administrative meeting on April 29 from 10-11 am.

4:03 Adjourn Meeting

The next meeting (an administrative one) will take place on Friday, April 29, from 10-11 am.

The next full meeting will take place on Friday, May 20, from 9-11 am, and 1-3 pm.