

City of Beverly, Massachusetts

Public Meeting Minutes

Board: Library Trustees

Date: March 24, 2026, 6:00 PM

Place: 32 Essex St.

Board members present: Margaret Altman, Mary Behrle, Dominic Copeland, Marshall Handly, Cathryn Keefe O'Hare, Ivy Mahan, Joanne Panunzio

Board members absent: Colleen Michaels, Kevin O'Reilly

Others present: Allison Babin, Meghan Karasin

Recorder: Meghan Karasin

Joanne Panunzio presided. Meghan Karasin stated that the meeting was being recorded.

Marshall Handly made a motion, seconded by Margaret Altman, to accept the minutes of the meeting of February 24, 2026, as amended. Motion passed 7-0.

Public Presentation

None

Committee Reports

Personnel: The process for the Director's Review will begin in April. Joanne Panunzio will prepare the staff survey.

Report of the Library Director

1. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget: The budget is on track but there has been a lot of movement of funds between lines. As a reminder there's a discretionary spending freeze in effect.

2. Fiscal Year 2027 Budget: The column title "Dept Req" is the initial request that was submitted to the Finance Director. Most lines are level-funded though there are some increases due to contractual requirements. There's been some adjustments between the heating and electricity lines to better reflect actual spending. The Materials Expenditure Requirement (MER) requires that we spend 13% of the appropriation on library materials. That's not fully funded by this request. We are expecting to supplement with \$15,807 out of trust funds for FY27. We decreased the Computer Software & Equipment line by \$5000 due to a grant that we received this year that will replace all public computers. Allison Babin expects to be invited to a meeting with the Mayor and Finance Director in the next couple of weeks to go through the budget request. Allison Babin shared the Value of NOBLE Membership 2025 document to highlight that the value that Beverly receives from its membership in NOBLE is over \$500,000, while the cost is expected to be \$131,000 in FY27. Joanne Panunzio asked if state aid can be used for books and collections. Allison Babin said she prefers to use the trust funds first as many of them are restricted to books, while the state aid can be used for anything. This request exceeds the Municipal Appropriation Requirement (MAR) by \$32,000. The MAR is the minimum required, but does not provide enough for running the library.

3. Marblehead facing decertification in the State Aid to Public Libraries Program: The Town of Marblehead is looking to cut the library budget by 50% for FY27. They just completed a renovation of the library but the town finances are in rough shape. If the proposed cut remains the case, they will be decertified. The Marblehead Library Director is working with her trustees to determine whether they remain fully operational until December 1 and close at that point, or dramatically cut and limp along for a full year. If they close on December 1, they will automatically be decertified. If they apply for a waiver, which won't be granted, they'll be decertified at some point between February and April.

Last April the trustees reviewed our Policy on Lending to Residents of Municipalities with Closed or Decertified Libraries. If Marblehead is decertified we would bring this back to a vote of the Trustees to not lend to Marblehead residents. There is a campaign launching in Marblehead for an override which, if it passes, could change things for the library. Joanne Panunzio asked if there was concern about this happening to Beverly, given the current budget deficit. Allison Babin stated that she's worried about the FY27 budget in general for the city, but believes the library is well valued. There was a time that the library did lose certification in 2002-2003.

4. Building/Vehicle Issues: The HVAC project has been ramping up with work on the mezzanine and third floor. They've been working on removing old insulation and installing back plates. The library will close this Thursday-Sunday. During this time they will blow in spray-foam insulation, perform gutter work on the Winter St. entrance, and begin the work of repainting the 3rd floor stairwell. All full-time staff will work remotely during this closure. The custodial staff will be on site. They are still on track to fully wrap the project on May 15.

The cost of replacing the garage door for the bookmobile is almost \$19,000. The Finance Director said the funds would have to be found within the library budget. Due to the spending freeze, we had funds in a few lines that could not be spent. There was also a large overage in the full time line due to a retirement in the beginning of the year. Funds were moved from six budget lines to fund this repair. We expect the work to begin mid-April.

5. Collections/Services: Allison Babin shared the Study Room data. The study rooms are most popular at 9am during the weekday, and less used in the evening and weekends. The study pod, funded by a grant, has been ordered, and we tentatively expect to get it in late April. We purchased 3 more translation devices and will have one at every service desk and in the Library of Things. All public computers (33) will be replaced through the Connected and Online Grant. It will be a major project, working with NOBLE, to get these all installed. Mary Behrle asked if the library pays NOBLE for each device. Allison Babin stated that we do pay a small fee for each computer serviced by NOBLE. The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Title II web accessibility standards / Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 is a new law that requires websites to be more accessible to those with disabilities. The library qualifies as a small municipality so we have until April 2027 to comply. Our website developer offered a technical audit to assess issues with our website at a cost of \$1200. The Head of Communications has a lot of skills in this area. She can fix some issues herself and we will have Stirling fix others. The current website is 85% compliant with the guidelines. Nahant, which has never been in a library network, is joining NOBLE as an associate member, similar to Montserrat.

6. Community Engagement: Beverly Reads *The Bear* is launching. The books will go out on display tomorrow evening. The Communications team has made a beautiful flyer with all of *The Bear* related

programming and is collecting photos of community members with our giant bear cutout. Since 2024, Katie Nelson, Teen Librarian, has been attending Lunch Bunch at the middle school. The Middle School Librarian is retiring this week, but they are in the process of hiring a new librarian. The Friends Spring Book Sale runs April 11-18. Preview Night for members is Friday April 10 from 5:30-8:30 PM. The Bookmobile is attending outreach events at the YMCA Health Kids Day and Endicott's Sensory-Friendly Touch a Truck event. The Seed Library launches April 1 here at the main library.

7. Programs: Much of the adult programming for the next month is highlighted in the Community Read flyer. Teens also have Downtown Cleanup, Creative Writing Club, and Graphic Novel Book Club. Childrens has story times, Lego Club, and Graphic Novel Club.

Communications

None at this time.

Unfinished Business

None at this time.

New Business

Allison's current contract expires April 26. There were some minor changes to update salary, longevity and holidays to match the rest of the library staff.

Joanne Panunzio made a motion, seconded by Marshall Handly, to accept the Library Director's contract for 2026-2029. Motion passed 7-0.

List of Documents/Exhibits

- Draft minutes of the February 24, 2026 meeting
- FY 2026 Budget report as of March 20, 2026
- FY 2027 Preliminary Draft Budget
- Value of NOBLE Membership 2025 Document
- Boston Globe article: *'That pot of money has pretty much run out.'* Affluent Marblehead could have to close the town library to balance its books. March 17, 2026 by Hannah Goeke
- Policy on Lending to Residents of Municipalities with Closed or Decertified Libraries
- Study Room Usage Data
- Accessibility Audit for Beverly Public Library by Stirling Brandworks
- Beverly Reads *The Bear* flyer

The next regular meeting of the board is Tuesday, April 28 at 6 PM in person at the main library.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:50 PM.