



Fletcher Free Library
LIBRARY BOARD of COMMISSIONERS
Special Meeting
Friday, April 19, 9:30 am
Fletcher Free Library
Local History Room
Minutes

Present: Emily Copeland, Chol Dhoor, Patrick Halladay, Vivian Halladay, Melissa Hutson, Amy Mellencamp, Jessica Nordhaus, Gale Batsimm, Mary Danko, Carol Livingston. Guests: Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanek, Erin Jacobsen

Welcome: Amy welcomed everyone, followed by introductions.

Approval of minutes from March 20, Emily moved, Patrick seconded. Approved.

Approval of agenda, Patrick moved, Emily seconded. Approved.

Public Forum: No public discussion

Discussion with Mayor Mulvaney-Stanek regarding Safety and Library Use Issues: Amy noted that the Commission role is to be an advocate for the library and to advocate for staff. This special meeting is to have a conversation and to discuss the letter the Library Commission sent to the Mayor.

The Mayor appreciated that the Commission letter presented specific requests. She noted she has two clear priorities: delivering a balanced budget and community safety. The Mayor described herself as a collaborative leader--we are better when we can think together. She is hoping to gather a group of community leaders, that includes the library, and would like to pull this together in May. The charge is immediate solutions and identifying what isn't working on this complicated issue. The Mayor advocates for Overdose Prevention Centers and noted that a bill has advanced through senate, is in committee and heading to floor, likely with a veto proof majority. It is a critical piece and Burlington is ready to put its hand up. We need to start piloting this and identifying what needs to surround for support services. Warming shelter had short term services with wound care and other expertise. That was included in the bill and direction to make sure money can come directly to Burlington. Shifting of attitudes from shaming and blame and moving to medical disorder and moving to helping those folks. Hopefully this moves this efficiently, but it is at least a year out. The Mayor believes it is important for state to be included.

The Mayor met with folks regarding the housing crisis to advocate for better systems of support. She noted we have a broken emergency housing system and wants a more programmatic approach and a dignified response. How do we fill this gap between day shelter? There are no open low barrier shelters. There is the high number of 192 point-in-time count unhoused folks. The seasonal system of emergency shelter may have worked some years ago but doesn't match today's reality. When folks have nowhere to go they will create encampments and not be in the safest situations. Emphasis will be on creating relationships and baseline services to fill this gap., hopefully pulling resources from the state. Behaviors are much harder to crack. Everyone has their version of how they're trying to approach this, and are dealing with compassion fatigue. We need to address safety system that is able to respond so that library staff are not becoming defacto safety officers. It is also important not to

make unrealistic promises. Police officers are not answer to every situation and there are not candidates waiting to apply for the police department. Not all CSLs are social workers, it is important to make sure we have the right people. Emma wants people to come up with creative ideas. Emily thanked the Mayor and wanted to underscore looking no further than library itself to see people doing that work creatively and compassionately. Staff has been doing all sorts of things and found funding to train staff in verbal judo de-escalation training. The library has many approaches before making a call to police. The library has become an injection site. Sometimes library staff struggle with pushback that seems extreme for our approach and that is why ask for extra security when situations ramp up quickly. When we started security was doing what staff was doing and now security is making initial approach and staff is needed to provide support. Chol and Patrick each noted that when moving to Burlington, the library was their welcoming space. It is a strong community asset in building and staff. Amy noted the library restrooms are the public bathrooms other than Portland Loo at City Hall Park. Melissa said when portapotties were out for eclipse day it was less strain on the library. When something shifts in community with shelters we feel it at library. Vivian said the community is lucky that there is a teen space, but some students are not going downtown or to the library because they are not feeling safe. Jessica said we have been talking about people making it here under their own steam, but also people are delivered here, the impact on Burlington is real. She believes UVM and the UVM ER needs to be involved in the conversations around community safety. She also mentioned that she understands that people who are discharged from the UVM ER are sometimes given cab fare to come to the library. Chol lauded the leadership of staff given strategic location and being able to be flexible; he also said to remember the availability of the NNE Branch and the things the library has done to support community, loaning hotspots and charging stations, pushing beyond books to help people, provide computers to help people find housing and jobs, and Community Partners to come in. Creative solutions we come up with need to allow wonderful services to happen rather than having to pull back. Every Thanksgiving and Christmas the library is open to serve. Patrick said the humanity at the library is to be celebrated, now let them do work that they are trained to do as librarians. How do we make sure budget meets community safety needs? Amy asked to have library broken window fixed. Erin appreciated the suggestion of using free meeting space for mayoral public meetings. Jessica suggested the Mayor might take up the tradition of a Mayor's book club and citywide read, noting UVM provides the books. Gale asked for there to be some city coordination of holiday meal distribution this year as well as a chart with when to call CSLs, CSOs, etc., for types of issues.

Motion to adjourn: Jessica moved, Emily seconded. Approved.

New Business: None

Adjournment. Next meeting: May 22, 2024 at 7:45 am at Fletcher Free Library