

AMHERST TOWN LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES MINUTES

May 18, 2026

Attendees: Amy Lapointe, Nancy Baker, Jackie McKnight (*alt*), Jim McGinness, CJ Butler (*alt*), Toni Dinkel, and Gretchen Pyles **Via Zoom:** Dave Hallenbeck, Nancy Head (*alt*), and Steve Mantius. **Absent:** Liz Larson

Nancy Baker called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. At that time the in-person quorum consisted of Nancy Baker, Jim McGinness, Toni Dinkel, CJ Butler and Jackie McKnight. Dave Hallenbeck and Nancy Head were on Zoom.

Minutes from Previous Meeting: Jackie McKnight moved and Toni Dinkel seconded to accept the minutes from the April 20, 2026, meeting. Motion passed.

Public Comments: none

Library Director's Report:

- **Statistics & Circulation:** April circulation numbers are down. This seems largely due to the new renewal policy. Previously, initial checkouts and renewals were not tracked separately. Looking into it, Amy found that our current statistics for initial checkouts are down only slightly while the renewals, which had constituted as much as 50% or more of the circulation figure, have shown a significant drop. Children's circulation is also down from a year earlier, mostly because of the temporary situation from November's flood. Dave asked if this is a temporary blip; Amy noted she hopes so, but it may take a whole year to establish proper year-to-year comparisons. Other libraries in the GMILCS system have reported comparable drops (Bedford: 20%).
- **Summer Reading Program:** Features a "Monopoly board challenge". The adult prize baskets are reported to be awesome.
- **Children's Programs:** Includes sessions on how to create and publish a children's book, led by staff member Lisa Griffin, an experienced published author and illustrator. The incentives program will feature lanyards with children-designed badges instead of traditional tchotchkes.
- **Adult Programs / Book Clubs:** One-off book club meetings are being introduced to handle overflow from the regular reading groups.
- **Town & School Cooperation:** The student art show is still up. The opening historically draws the highest door-count of the year, which held true this year, not dampened by the rain. The event was entirely put together by the Friends of the Library.

- **AI Technology Initiatives:** Amy ran a prompt through ChatGPT and Claude regarding *"a bulleted list of points where AI relates to small public libraries."* Dave suggested a follow-up prompt to apply those results specifically to the Amherst Public Library. Amy sent the full contents of the chats to the board in an email.

New Gifts: \$1,150 received from the Friends of the Library to pay for the 2026 winter concert series. Gretchen Pyles moved to accept the gift; Toni Dinkel seconded; motion passed.

Non-Public Session:

Jim McGinness moved, and Tony Dinkel seconded, to begin a non-public session of this meeting. The results of the roll call vote were: Ayes: Nancy Baker, Jim McGinness, Toni Dinkel, CJ Butler, Jackie McKnight, Dave Hallenbeck, Nancy Head; Nays: none; Absent: Liz Larson, Steve Mantius, Gretchen Pyles (*Gretchen arrived after this vote, during the discussion.*)

The board entered a non-public session to discuss personnel compensation at 6:30 p.m.

- **Personnel Matter:** Michele, the library bookkeeper, has served for a good number of years and is currently paid at Grade 3. Amy saw that comparable bookkeeper positions at the police and fire departments pay at Grade 5. Michelle is paid at that rate when she does work for those departments. A proposal was made to adjust her library pay rate to Grade 5 starting with the July 1 pay period (budget effect is approximately \$17.81 per pay period).
- **Action:** Toni Dinkel moved to approve this pay adjustment on the effective date. Jim McGinness seconded. A roll call vote was taken; the motion passed unanimously. The results of the roll call vote were: Ayes: Nancy Baker, Jim McGinness, Gretchen Pyles, Toni Dinkel, CJ Butler, Jackie McKnight, Dave Hallenbeck, Nancy Head; Nays: none; Absent: Liz Larson, Steve Mantius
- **Exiting non-public Session:** Jim McGinness moved to leave the non-public session and to **not** seal the minutes from the non-public portion. (Compensation of town employees is public record.) Seconded by Gretchen Pyles. A roll call vote was taken and passed unanimously. The results of the roll call vote were: Ayes: Nancy Baker, Jim McGinness, Gretchen Pyles, Toni Dinkel, CJ Butler, Jackie McKnight, Dave Hallenbeck, Nancy Head; Nays: none; Absent: Liz Larson, Steve Mantius

Non-public session ended at 6:55 p.m.

(Note: Steve Mantius joined the meeting via Zoom following the conclusion of the non-public session).

Treasurer's Report:

One line item is currently over budget due to a deposit payment made for contractor work covered by insurance, which was attributed to the library's Buildings & Grounds budget line item. This will look like an overspend during budget examinations, so an explanation will need to be documented for when this is questioned in the future. The board recommended that Amy speak with the town finance department again about journaling this as a town expense rather than a library expense, and matching it with the insurance payment that covers it.

Old Business:

- **Lower Level Reconstruction & Renovations Project:** The children's room shelving poses unique spatial challenges compared to adult collections. It's not just a matter of linear feet. The staff has done aggressive weeding and specific planning for the shelving needs, with Amy praising Carla's "superhero" efforts. However, the contractor quote process has been laborious, shifting line items back and forth, and the comprehensive quote still misses certain items. Uncertainties remain on whether to paint, partially or completely replace ceiling tiles. No physical work has begun, and total costs sit around **\$320,000** (\$50K furniture, \$30K audio-visual, \$110K shelving, \$100K contractor estimate including ceiling tile replacement—all items *not* covered by insurance). ServPro mitigation cost \$30K, and insurance-covered restorations sit at \$80K. The Friends of the Library generously indicated they could contribute \$200K–\$225K (made possible in part by a large casino windfall check that will not be repeated any time soon). This leaves a funding gap of \$100K–\$150K required from trustee funds. Steve noted the project is more expensive than anticipated but agreed it is appropriate to use trustee funds for capital expenditures rather than operational costs. Nancy Baker emphasized that this disaster presented a unique opportunity to fully upgrade the space. Over the recent history of the library, several decades, the library has not asked the public for taxpayer funds for renovations or improvements.
- **Action Taken:** Jim McGinness moved, and Nancy Baker seconded, to authorize an "up to" amount of **\$150,000** in trustee funds for Amy to use toward the contracting process. The motion passed. The checking account currently has a \$99K balance, with \$60K easily available; Steve cautioned that the account balance should not drop below \$25K. Other trust fund accounts will be tapped according to their individual availability for this use.
- **Public Relations:** The board notes they will need to plan a future celebration to share the completed renovations with the public.

New Business:

- **Joint Staff-Trustees Meeting:** Scheduled for **Thursday, June 25, starting at 8:15** It will begin with a joint meeting with staff followed by an abbreviated trustee meeting.

- The session will break out into small tables (1–2 trustees per table) using the focus of a 10-year outlook ("In 10 years, what will our community need from us?") Also discussed was a "Rose, Thorn, and Bud" model (What's great, what's a pain, what are future possibilities?) used in the schools. We want to keep it actionable and measurable over a few months. The other goals of the meeting are integrating new staff and fostering staff-trustee connections. There will be no assigned pre-reading. Amy and Nancy Baker will refine the framework further before June 25.

Gretchen Pyles moved to adjourn, Toni Dinkel seconded. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Next Scheduled Meeting: Joint Staff-Trustee Meeting on Thursday, June 25, 2026, at 8:15 a.m.

Submitted by Jim McGinness