



- Younger has announced a hiring freeze and is looking at all town agencies and departments.
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- **Phil Curtis, the chair of the Warrant Committee**, explained that group's task as preparing a budget for town meeting. With a keen sense of the \$4M shortfall if the town projects a continuation of services as we have now, there will be a worse situation if there is a reduction in state aid. Curtis explained the need to "earn our override" by demonstrating that the town government runs as efficiently as possible before asking for more funding. Therefore consolidation of services within the town is important. It is the sense of the Warrant Committee that the Benton branch should be closed. Although the amount saved will be small, it still matters. The town should then sell the building. The greater goal is to have the town come together for the override.
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- **Virginia Jordan, Friends of the Benton Library**, noted that in a time of a troubled economy, it is important to preserve community institutions. The Benton branch has the support of 10 town meeting members from Precinct 6 as well as the Oakley Neighborhood Association and citizens surveyed on this topic. Benton costs relatively little to operate. While Sustainable Belmont encourages walking, Benton is a walking destination. Restoring children's programs would restore the number of users. If the building is closed, the library is gone forever. The sale of the building would be tax neutral for the town, and proceeds from the sale could not be used for the town's operating budget.
- Jordan stated that the library statistics are a little misleading; there is no traffic if the doors are locked. The Friends of the Benton Library were informed at town hall that any funds they raise could not be used to pay for staff. The \$11K noted on the library statistics for repairs seems overstated; the Warrant Committee and the Board of Selectmen should care for repairs in a timely manner. The question remains –how can we best use the assets we have? Benton creates a community with neighbors fertilizing the lawn and caring for the hedges. When the economic pendulum swings back, as it will, it is hoped that Benton will be a branch library ready to take advantage of better times.
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- **Sonia Guterman, Oakley Road**, read a letter from a Cambridge librarian extolling the benefits of branch libraries which provide more personalized service for patrons.
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- **Linda Santamaria DeCorta, Pine Street**, addressed the importance of the Benton branch for senior citizens.
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- **Elaine Alligood, trustee**, explained the library's financial responsibility to the entire system while noting the main library staff's knowledge of their patrons and the library outreach programs.
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- **Richard Cheek, Historic District Commission**, spoke of the dual nature of the asset that is the Benton branch library – first, as a library, and second, as an 1892

Country Gothic building that is part of our architectural heritage. A tremendous amount of thought is needed before any action is taken. Our architectural heritage must be taken seriously; this branch library is also an asset noted by realtors.

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- **Cynthia Fields – (?), Newton Street**, represented families with small children who could not be present at the meeting. Without a professional library system in the schools, parents depend on the library. Taking away a library “does not fly.” Money is always found if there is a flood. In a 24/7 world, one day a week of 1-6 p.m. hours does not work.
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- **Hal Shubin, Chair**, explained that statistics show that when Benton was open for more hours, there was less circulation of materials.
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- **Virginia Jordan** added that people from Waverley come to Benton. Belmont is a collection of neighborhoods with civic buildings – such as Benton- needed for benign civic encounters.
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- **Hal Shubin, Chair**, said that efficiency must be considered to provide the best services for the entire town.
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- **Virginia Jordan** asked if the \$5.3 grant could build some branch libraries. The answer is no.
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- **Nancy Forbes, Pine Street**, bought her home because of Benton library. The statistics presented are ludicrous when one considers the cost of Benton vs. the main library. The trustees have not been creative; the main library could be closed a few hours a week. There is no civic institution in our neighborhood.
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- **Maureen Connors, Director**, explained that she worked in two branch libraries and understands the importance of a branch library with its personalized service. The budget is two items – people and materials. Benton is a very small facility. The library must deal with the budget and the directives; a level-funded budget would be a huge cut for the library.
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- **Mark Milton, Emerson Street**, said that the whole town is being asked to support something of benefit for a small group. He also noted the negative impact of cuts and the cost of keeping Benton open. Resources are trapped at Benton for a week resulting in costs to the entire system. Keeping the library open past 6 p.m. would not work for young children.
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- **Virginia Jordan** spoke of the proposal from the Friends of the Benton Library to the trustees. Noting that Benton serves ½ the town, if one is to drive to a library, it might as well be to Watertown. The library returns free cash to the town each year; it is not transparent where the library monies go.
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- **Maureen Conners, Director** clarified that the library has not turned monies of that sort back to the town.
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- **Pat Bruschi, Warrant Committee**, agreed with Conners.
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- **Sonia Guterman** presented her hypothesis that the closing of Benton has been on the minds of some people for some time and that it has been starved of resources.
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- **Pauline Reynolds, Preble Gardens Road**, said that Benton was open in the Great Depression. The walk to the main library is a long one for seniors and mothers with strollers. Since 1995 there have been few additions to the children's collection; the Friends have offered to assist.
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- **Brian Saper, Old Middlesex Road**, defined the issue of closing Benton as making an example for the citizens of Belmont that we are fiscally responsible. In addition, there is not enough parking at the main library.
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- **Richard Cheek** reviewed the history of Benton. It served for 10 years as a chapel, then it was used for town meetings, for two churches to hold services before their buildings were completed, then a gift to the town as a library. We accepted the stewardship of the building. How have we kept this stewardship?
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- **Grace Takvorian, Old Middlesex Road**, asked that the fate of the beloved Payson Park School not be mirrored in the library's future. In hard times, the town needs to think and work together, not close an important part of a community.
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- **Hal Shubin, Chair**, concluded the meeting at 8:55 p.m. Shubin reiterated that the goal of the evening was to listen to comments from the community. The trustees will discuss the question of closing the Benton branch library at a meeting on October 30<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. This meeting, as are all the meetings of the Board of Library Trustees, is open to the public.
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- Respectfully submitted, Mary E. Keenan, secretary