

BELMONT PUBLIC LIBRARY
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
30, 2008

BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS
OCTOBER

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- The meeting was called to order by Chair Hal Shubin at 7:35 p.m. in the Flett Room of the library. Present were Trustees Elaine Alligood, Mary Keenan, Matt Lowrie, David Rich, and Heli Tomford and Director Maureen Connors. Also attending were Ann Armstrong, William Engstrom, Cynthia Fields-Belangez, Nancy Forbes, and Virginia Jordan, supporters of the Benton branch library.
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- Chair Shubin presented the first agenda item – should the Benton branch library remain open or should it be closed? Trustees responded in turn:
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 - **David Rich:** The Benton library building has a historic nature and what happens to the building matters; it is not for the library trustees to decide, but it is an important community resource. As a branch library, there is no real prospect of increased hours. The main library is used by the entire town. The Long Range Plan Committee, which has recently completed its work, received requests for materials, programs, better coordination with the schools, but none for a branch library. On frequent visits to other towns, it is clear that even the main library does not match what other area towns are offering with their new/renovated buildings. Our focus must be the main library.
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 - **Elaine Alligood:** Agreeing with Mr. Rich, Ms. Alligood spoke to the issue of parity. In her own survey of Belmont residents who are not in the Benton area, Ms. Alligood learned that residents off Mill Street are among those who wish for more of a town presence in their neighborhood. Others surveyed expressed concern about the defused resources of the main library. There are possibilities for the creative reuse of the building; a paradigm shift in the town’s thinking is needed.
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 - **Matt Lowrie:** After expressing his philosophy in favor of town services, Mr. Lowrie noted that the breadth of use of a branch library precludes serving the town as a whole. The proposal for private staffing is not possible due to liability issues. Benton supporters are advised to talk with the Board of Selectmen and the Warrant Committee to investigate use of the building for community programs and events.
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 - **Mary Keenan:** After thanking the Benton supporters for expressing their views, Ms. Keenan noted her own use of the Benton branch library in the 1950s, a very different world. Despite meetings stretching back to the summer of 2006, there has been no dollar amount of the assistance forthcoming from the Friends of the Benton Library. The library budget is already lean and all amounts are “small” amounts – for example, summer Saturday hours which are of utmost importance. The money just isn’t there for Benton.
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 - **Hal Shubin:** Mr. Shubin said that the question of Benton matched his tenure as chair of the trustees. In April 2006, hours were reduced as an experiment to

determine usage which spiked at first, then decreased. The experiment of five hours a week has failed. The library was willing to have a presence in the Senior Center but this was not supported financially by the town.

- When Nancy Forbes questioned the lack of notice for the Benton forum, Mr. Shubin itemized all the ways the meeting was publicized.
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- Continuing his presentation, Mr. Shubin recognized that Benton has served a small part of town very well, but as Warrant Chair Phil Curtis stated, the town officials have to earn an override by showing fiscal responsibility. How we spend money and how it appears we spend money are both to be considered. Richard Cheek (Historic District Comm.) made some comments about the building which are very important. Keeping the branch open with volunteers is not possible due to resulting town liability, according to town counsel. This impossibility of using volunteers to keep the branch open was clarified at a Trustees meeting two years ago.
- **Heli Tomford:** Ms. Tomford expressed appreciation for the time people have taken to attend the forum, write notes, etc. She then reviewed the 1982 historic building study and
 - noted as well issues of neighborhoods – Little Pond, Purecoat, Cushing Square – all with current concerns. It is disappointing there has not been more financial support for Benton. Ms. Tomford suggested a compromise – close the library now, with re-opening dependent on support forthcoming from the community.
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- Trustee Lowrie explained that closing means the branch is closed. Re-opening would need budgetary changes.
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- Chair Shubin asked those in attendance for their views.
- **Virginia Jordan:** Ms. Jordan expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be here, noting the long time that has been spent on this. The library is being asked to do more with less, with pressure from the Board of Selectmen and Warrant Committee.
 - Chair Shubin said he does not feel any town pressure.
 - Ms. Jordan spoke of the isolation of Benton in a library system based on community building. Benton supporters are not fundraisers; we must work together. If the main library is a community center, why not have Benton as another center, also? If the collection were winnowed, the furniture moved, the paradigm shifted, Benton could be a destination. A moth-balled building will be abandoned and vandalized.
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- **William Engstrom:** The main library needs space which is available at Benton. The building is not suitable for a house. It could be a model center for the community. Benton also has an impact on real estate values.
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- **Cynthia Fields-Belangez:** Benton is important for children's programs. Why aren't there more?

- Director Connors explained that it is hard to justify children's programs at Benton when only three children are in attendance.

- When Virginia Jordan asked that the trustees listen and work with the Benton supporters,

- Chair Shubin said it was too late for new proposals; it is incumbent on Benton supporters to note that the point-of-view of the trustees is the entire town.

- A motion made by Trustee Rich and seconded by Chair Shubin, reads

- **To close Benton as a library no sooner than the end of the calendar year or as soon as practicable, recommending to the Board of Selectmen that they work with the community on the reuse of this historic building.**

- Trustee Tomford raised the question of the FY09 budget for Benton; is the town asking for cuts to the FY09 budget? Director Connors replied that due to anticipated increases in the line items for electricity and gas, that the Town Administrator recommended closing the Benton branch library.

- Trustee Tomford amended the motion on a second by Trustee Alligood by adding the Board of Trustees to be part of the decision-making process on the reuse of Benton. Trustee Lowrie said this was beyond our role as trustees; Trustee Keenan added that the Historic District Comm. and the Historical Society had this as their function. Trustee Alligood supported an advisory role for the trustees. Ms. Jordan asked that the library to be turned over the Friends of the Benton Library, Proposal B. Chair Shubin said this was impossible (reasons noted earlier). Mr. Engstrom asked the trustees to work with him to convince the Board of Selectmen that the stream of parking fines (uncollected) be used for Benton. Chair Shubin said this was not discussable.

- The Tomford/Alligood motion that the Board of Selectmen work with the community and library trustees was voted on and defeated - 4 against (Keenan, Lowrie, Rich, Shubin) and 2 for (Alligood, Tomford).

- The original motion

- **To close Benton as a library no sooner than the end of the calendar year or as soon as practicable, recommending to the Board of Selectmen that they work with the community on the reuse of this historic building**

- was voted.

- The motion passed unanimously with all six trustees voting Aye.

- Discussion about the timing of the closure ensued. Time is needed for the Benton supporters to talk with the Board of Selectmen. Questions about the removal of the books, furnishings, the turn-off of utilities, were raised. To settle this, Trustee Keenan with a second from Trustee Alligood moved

- **That the Chair of the Board of Library Trustees and the Director be empowered to work with the Board of Selectmen with discretion and diplomacy on closing Benton.**

- This motion passed unanimously with five votes; Trustee Tomford was out of the room.

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- Chair Shubin presented the second agenda item – the budget for FY10.

- Director Connors reviewed the requested budgets –

- a level service budget
- a level dollar budget
- a 5% reduction budget.

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- Each budget was then reviewed. The level dollar budget will keep summer Saturdays. Trustee Rich asked about reduced hours at the library; Director Connors explained there may be a need to close the library to the public while the staff is on-duty to catch up with the work not done due to reduced staffing.

- Even though the trustees most certainly oppose the 5% reduction budget, it was voted with the realization that all departments have been asked to submit this.

- Money from the Dustan Fund could be used for youth programs.

- Perhaps the window shades could be a donation for advertising same.

- Director Connors had asked for clarification on the \$6000 asked by the town for this year's over-runs.

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- Trustee Lowrie, with a second from Trustee Rich, made a motion

- **That the FY2010 Budget be approved subject to the discussed revisions to be implemented and approved by the Director and the Chair.**

- The motion passed unanimously.

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- The next meeting will be **Tuesday November 25th, 2008.**

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- Respectfully submitted, Mary E. Keenan, Secretary

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