

Trustees of the M.N. Spear Memorial Library
March 21, 2022 7:30pm, on Zoom
Minutes

- Members present: Michele Regan-Ladd, Tim Logan, Brad Foster, Savannah Ouellette, Melanie DeSilva, Kate Cell
- Mary Anne Antonellis: Library Director
- Guests: Rita Farrell, Rebecca Torres, Penny Jaques, Penelope Kim, Catherine Hilton, Susie Mosher.

Mary Anne made an announcement that the meeting is being held via Zoom due to the pandemic.

- Mary Anne spoke with the MBLC today and they have received a draft of the cost estimate. The final documents will be available Wednesday and they will share them with us. The preliminary cost estimate is: \$6.3 million, the grant amount would be \$3.58 million, and the local match would be \$2.72 million. The construction costs are \$4.3 million. The engineering, architectural costs, and furniture, fixtures, equipment, and contingencies are \$2 million. Costs are coming in very high, driven by fuel costs, inflation, and the war according to the MBLC and the estimators. Mary Anne is shocked by the number.
- The next grant round might be in 2 to 3 years. The MBLC does not know what the reimbursement rate will be in the next grant cycle, but it is unlikely to be 75%.
- What is special about this grant cycle is that they are committing to 75% of eligible costs of the total project costs.
- Part of why the building costs are higher is that we are investing in the energy systems (tight building, solar) up front which will drive down the operating costs of the building.
- This cost estimate is very unexpected. One Trustee described it as a blow.
- The Trustees do not need to make a decision this evening. One Trustee reports that they cannot in good conscience put this before Town Meeting.
- Another Trustee reflection- We need to talk with the finance committee and find out what the selectboard thinks. With construction costs now- keep in mind the new Amherst school will cost \$100 million- they were surprised it was not higher.
- We have \$550,000 saved now, plus the cost of the land brings us close to \$600,000 which leaves us with \$2.1 million to come up with.
- Becky Torres: We are caught in inflation and unfortunate times. If we got to choose when this would be done, we would not have picked now. 18 months or a year from now things might look differently. The critical thing that needs to happen now is that annual town meeting vote. Once we go out to bid in a possibly different climate, it might come back as a much more manageable number. There are a variety of paths to take to consider the \$2 million. The finance committee will look at the different scenarios. When we were looking at what we hoped would be \$800k to 1 million it was possible we would not have to go for a debt exclusion override. For this amount we might do a debt exclusion override. Bottomline: Town meeting should have a chance to

decide this. There are too many financial scenarios that need to be reviewed before any decisions are made.

- Rita Farrell: Concurs with Becky. She is not surprised by the number, especially in light of construction costs and inflation. Put it to the people. Everyone needs to sharpen their pencils and look at town finances. The town has significant reserves, and the capacity to take on debt, and to back away from this opportunity before we explore what might be possible financially would be a mistake. A lot of residents are very invested in a new library and its incumbent upon the trustees to see if we can make this work. Having worked with housing developers, you have to have the attitude that you are going to make it work until you cannot make it work. We need to take a long hard look at the finances and then let Town Meeting decide.
- Trustee reflection: Why is the percentage of ineligible costs higher than anticipated? Has what's eligible and ineligible changed?
- We are still in the running for the grant. Otis' project is bigger and more expensive, and they have not done any fundraising, but they have a different tax base than us. The MBLC is making an announcement on the first Thursday in April. They called Mary Anne today to give us the opportunity to withdraw to save ourselves the painful process of going through a town vote and losing.
- Trustee reflection: The only issue right now that we have to face is communication. If we decide to move forward with this, how do we communicate the price point? We do not want people to think that we have not been transparent about the cost. How do we address people who claim that we have been pulling their legs this whole time? We need to continue to be very transparent and describe exactly what is going on. The estimate came in a lot higher than we anticipated. On the other hand, the very things that are impacting the cost- the inflation, the war, etc. – are all the more reason we need this library to establish and reinforce community. We should go for it. As supporters of the library the cost estimate is a shock, but we owe it to the town to have that option and we owe it to ourselves to do the best possible job we can. Our ability to be transparent has been phenomenal. If the town votes it down, so be it. It will be the townspeople's choice.
- Susie Mosher- This is the very same library plan that the residents of this town drew up; a great building program and a perfect library for the community. We need a library in Shutesbury. We need to be clear that this is what this library costs. We may have hoped other things and wished we were in another time, but this is the library that was drawn up to meet the needs of the town. This is a very unique opportunity. We are in a very special position to be in a grant that has a better reimbursement and an open-ended commitment to cover 75% of the eligible costs. This opportunity can only go away. This opportunity is not going to be there next time. We should lay out a process whereby this project goes to the finance committee which will bring all the tools that they can to this project. There are various options that can be considered to fund this project. A warrant article can be drafted, it will go to town meeting, and the people will decide if they want a library. This is our opportunity to get a library. We know that this opportunity does not present itself like this in the future.

- Trustee reflection: We should go for it. There is no guarantee that when the next grant cycle comes around that inflation will not be higher, construction costs will not be even higher, and we will have wished that we had moved forward now. We know what is going away is them paying 75% of the eligible costs. They know it is a lot of money, but we need a new library. Especially with the closing of the bathroom and all of the other problems with the current library, we simply cannot carry on this way.
- Penelope Kim: Thank you for all you have done. This is a great opportunity. It is time. It is time for this to happen. There are an awful lot of people in town who have been hoping and working together and there's momentum. The big mo (momentum) is there. The amount of money and the concerns people may have about their individual tax rates is not insurmountable compared to everything. The money is not going to be as much of a consideration compared to the fact that this is a wonderful opportunity, and it is not going to come around again. I have waited a long time. People have been following this project with a great deal of enthusiasm; let us keep the momentum going.
- Trustee reflection: This is painful, but we have a lot of resources in this group, and this includes everyone here tonight. Let us look at our options before we get too discouraged. The estimate did not come in where we expected it to, but we have options. We have to keep up the energy, the communication, the fundraising, and just do it.
- Trustee reflection: There is so much momentum this time. Look at what we have raised in 11 years without the promise of a library. If we are awarded this grant, just imagine what is possible in terms of fundraising in addition to ideas from the finance committee. Now's the time. We have to at least go for it. We have to at least try.
- The clear sense of the Trustees as a group is that we should sit tight, see if we get the grant, gather information, and not withdraw at this point. We do not want to withdraw.
- Mary Anne will bring this to the finance committee. Becky will talk to Jim about the best time to fit Mary Anne in to provide this information to the finance committee or if they want to schedule a separate meeting to discuss this. Finance committee generally meets every two weeks. About \$370,00 is being requested for capital requests this year, but there are many ways to puzzle this out because of our very healthy reserves.
- Trustee reflection: We need to look at the details of the cost estimate which came in a lot higher than this trustee was anticipating. But we also need to keep going. We need to keep working on this and see what we can do. The sense from the meeting is that the Trustees generally agree that we should keep going.
- General agreement that we need to put out a statement immediately that we could draft tonight that states the facts as to what we know so far even though we will not have the written estimate until Wednesday. We need to get out in front of this. The morning after every meeting, the videos are requested. We need to make a statement ahead of scuttlebutt.
- Susie Mosher- We need to drive the car, be clear about what we know.

- Trustee reflection- They are not convinced that the estimates are the actual numbers we are going to have to deal with. A professional estimating group is not the same as a contractor. There are so many variables up in the air. It is not beneficial to get upset about this at this point. Certainly, the long-term benefits are worth far more to this community than the current cost estimate. We need to continue to be transparent and get a solid message out immediately. Do not let a high-cost estimate allow people to sabotage this opportunity by talking about this in ways that they do not know any more about than we do at this point.
- Rita Farrell: This is not on the agenda for Finance Committee tomorrow night so it should not be a topic of discussion tomorrow night- it is way too big. A statement needs to go out in the morning. This is going to be out there so get out in front of it.
- Susie Mosher- Finance Committee will be working on creating a timeline tomorrow night working from town meeting backwards. Finance committee is committed to scheduling meetings as often as necessary to make it all happen by town meeting and this project will be part of their timeline.
- Trustee reflection: There has been a lot of inflation in construction costs. Given this, they are grateful we have the opportunity to be part of a grant that gives a higher than usual reimbursement rate from the state (75% reimbursement of eligible costs).
- Trustee reflection: This trustee cannot be the spokesperson for this position. If we go forward with this grant, we will damage the position of the library. It is their job to advocate for the institution of the library. They cannot in good conscience communicate a project that costs more than twice as last time. It will be divisive and will be bad for the town and the library if we go forward with this. We need a library desperately, but this will be bad for the library.
- Trustee reflection: The town has the right to decide this issue.
- Trustee reflection: What we are endeavoring to do is to simply keep the ball rolling; not to take it to town meeting. We are not there yet. The next step is the finance committee to talk about what the options are. Our goal is to just take it one step at a time.
- Trustee reflection: We do not even know if we received the grant yet. We are just trying to gather information, integrate it, and figure out what it means and what's even possible or not possible.
- Trustee reflection: Whoever can speak to it, speak to it; whoever cannot, that is ok. All we can do is wait for the information and take it one step at a time. The state of the library is appalling. It hurts their sense of justice to see the unacceptable conditions present at the library.
- The group drafted a statement to be released immediately.

Documents discussed:

- Statement on the preliminary cost estimate

Next meeting: Monday, March 28 at 7:30pm.

Respectfully submitted by Melanie DeSilva, Secretary, Library Board of Trustees

