

2/22/22

Hello Everyone,

The Library Trustees would like to clarify a few points before the March Town Meeting. The Trustees present a budget to the Town each year because the library is a part of the Town municipality. The library has been a part of the municipality since 1911, when Laura Ainsworth donated the building to the town. The Selectmen of that time decided to accept the building and help establish a public library for all people in town to have equal access to information with no discrimination. The town has changed in many ways since 1911, but free access to information for the townspeople is still an essential role of the library. The Library Trustees are voted in by the townspeople and are fiscally responsible for the budget voted on by the townspeople at the annual Town Meeting. Because the library is a part of the municipality, the Town oversees the distribution of the library budget's funds. This process is done through a warrant system where the Library Trustees present monthly warrants to the Town to be paid from the voted budget; these warrants include bills, payroll, and employee benefits. Monthly ledgers from the Town represent the spending of the budget, they are public records. If there is an overage in the budget, the library covers that cost. The library has always paid any overage amounts and has never taken funds from any other part of the municipality; this is public information. Everyone has access to this information by contacting the Town or library and requesting the records.

In 2021, the Library Trustees presented a budget to the Selectboard three times for the fiscal year 2022-2023. The first budget was denied, which is normal. The second time the Trustees presented their budget, the Selectboard told them there could only be a 4% increase. The Trustees created a budget that had only a 4% increase and presented it to the Selectboard, this was the third budget presented to them. The budget was denied, and the Town made a separate article for the library budget to be voted on (Article 12) without input from the Library Trustees. This meant that the library was separated out from the general ledger. There was no apparent reason given to the Trustees why the requested 4% increased budget was not accepted. On page 82 of the Report, you will see that the Town has put zeros in the FY 2023 column. The Report also has not accurately represented the grant income that the library has received for any of the years presented. The Selectboard Chair told the Trustees, 'The decision has been made that the library will no longer be a part of the general ledger in the future.' (The Town Manager has confirmed this with a Trustee.) No reason was given for this decision. This year, the library's budget reflected an increase in the state minimum wage, the rest of the budget was level-funded. The Trustees have no control over minimum wage increases. There are four out of five employees that this affects in the library.

The library is an important hub for information for the town. It represents a vibrant part of Williamstown's downtown. Everything that is offered at the library is free. We provide services to people of all ages in Town. Free library cards give access to hundreds of books, online services, 24/7 internet, periodicals, and free programs like a monthly adult book group or numerous monthly youth programs (including school visits to the library). The library also offers free snowshoe usage, free passes to places like Shelburne Farms, State Parks and Historical sites,

and more. The library hosts yearly events like Trunk or Treat, Memorial Day book sales, scavenger hunts, a vibrant summer reading program for adults and youth to name just a few. We also have public computer usage, faxing, photocopying, and more. Taxpayers pay less than \$100 a year for these services. Currently, a third of Williamstown's residents use their library cards, showing that there is a need for these services.

When you look through the annual report for March's Town Meeting, please understand that the library is not in the general ledger; it has been removed and is a separate article. That means that the figure for the town ledger is significantly lower than it truly is because the library (and cemetery) is not represented there. The Library Trustees are asking you to vote for the Library Budget this year by voting for the separate article that the Selectboard created. (Article 12) The Trustees do not want to limit or stop the services currently offered to the town at the library and would have to do that if the library budget does not pass. We are also asking for you to vote that the library remains in the general fund each year since it is part of the municipality. This issue was brought forward at the 2019 Town Meeting, and the townspeople voted to keep the library in the general ledger. We would like to see the library continue to be in the general ledger as the townspeople wished and that the library does not have to defend itself each year in this way, as though it is somehow different from the other town entities like the highway department, fire department, ambulance, cemetery, and town offices. The Trustees feel that the town voters should control how the library appears in the Annual Town Report and that the Library Trustees should be able to present a budget and have it represented. The library wants to remain a part of the Municipality because it saves taxpayers money, creates an added level of checks and balances, and because it unites an important service for the townspeople with other important town services. We continue to be confused about why there is such animosity from the Town with regards to the library. The library wants to continue to be a pillar of the community and be in harmony with the other Town municipalities working together for the people in Williamstown.

If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with the Chairperson of the Library Trustees, Helen Duke. You can email her at [Library@Williamstownvt.org](mailto:Library@Williamstownvt.org) or leave a message at the library with your name and phone number and she will contact you 802 433-5887.

Sincerely,

The Library Trustees

Helen Duke : Chairperson

Tammy Griggs: Secretary

Jill Plastridge: Member

Karla Perkins: Member

Kathy Retchless: Member