

Brownell Library Trustees
Meeting Minutes
March 17, 2026

Brownell Library Trustees in attendance: Karen Hergesheimer, Jeanne Grant, Alex Carmical, Dottie Bergendahl, Helen Donahey, Jessica Dow, Venessa Luck, Beth Custer, Sheila Porter, Rhiannon A., Gabrielle S.

Library Staff in attendance: Ariana H., Wendy Hysko

Meeting called to order at 6:30 by Karen Hergesheimer

1. Agenda additions and deletions: None
2. Public to be heard: None
3. Announcements: Jeanne announced that while this would be the final meeting she would attend as a trustee, she remains committed to the welfare of Brownell Library. The Board expressed its gratitude for her service and leadership and presented her with a gift (as well as a card).

Ariana announced that beloved Youth Librarian Erna D. conducted her final Red Clover Club meeting this past week. The Board expressed its appreciation for her two decades of dedication to the craft.

4. Minutes of February 17, 2026: Sheila moved that the minutes be accepted without amendment; Dottie seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
5. Financial Report: Dottie reported the Trustee checking account has \$2081.82 and the Trustee CD is valued at \$2963.26. Furthermore, she predicted that, due to unavoidable costs, the building and grounds expenses will not come under budget for the fiscal year. Dottie noted that the Trustee CD matures on April 25, 2026. Sheila moved to liquidate the CD upon its maturation date and to move the funds into the Trustee checking account so that they could be used for the Brownell Library Centennial Party on July 17. Venessa seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
6. Library Director and Staff Report: Several Trustees expressed their appreciation for the report's new format, which includes headers and annotations that make it easier to digest. Karen cited the Staff's plan to emphasize the quality over the quantity of programs offered. She noted such a move can alleviate the pressure on an over-extended staff and, thus, help prevent burnout.

7. Committee Report: No committees.

8. Work Groups:

Centennial Celebration Work Group Report: Sheila said that a budget for the July 17 party will be presented soon. The party will feature, among other things, BBQ prepared by members of the Fire Department. Other celebrations include a trivia event hosted by the Essex Historical Society and a 1920s-themed party on May 30 to celebrate Samuel Brownell's birthday. The Trustees agreed to use the Memorial Day Parade book sale to promote centennial celebrations.

Sustainable Libraries Initiative Report: Assistant Library Director Hannah Tracy will replace Erna D. as the SLI lead. Wendy reported that over 50% of the certification process is complete.

9. Staff Education: Ariana discussed the work she does as Program Librarian and Assistant in Technical Services. As Assistant in Technical Services, she works behind the scenes to catalogue, prepare, and archive materials. As Program Librarian, she establishes collaborations with Library stakeholders and helps to plan events such as the Repair Cafe and the Train Hop as well as the many programs for adults. She noted that given space and time constraints (among others), it's crucial to identify what the public most values in programming. Virtues such as flexibility, agility, and receptivity are crucial for success; while strong turnout is valued, the benchmark for success is good (and constructive) patron feedback.

10. Old Business:

Group Norms: Trustees continued their discussion of how group norms can improve the Board's ability to promote the welfare of the Library. Helen identified the importance of setting ground rules that govern in-meeting interactions among Trustees, *e.g.* rules against cursing at each other. Dottie added that observing time limits—perhaps using a time keeper—could be helpful. In this vein, Alex advocated adhering strictly to the agenda. Wendy noted that the Staff also struggles to limit the length of its meetings and suggested that Robert's Rules of Order, or some analogue, could be useful. Additionally, Rhiannon expressed the importance of periodically re-visiting group norms and how they can make the Board more effective. Venessa highlighted that group norms can help the Board identify the strengths of the individual members such that the Board's efficacy can be enhanced. Jessica said a document, or set of resources, which supplements the current online resources, would help to orient new Trustees. Karen said that she will reflect on these suggestions.

Mentoring: After discussion, the Trustees agreed that a work group consisting of Sheila, Jessica, and Venessa would be created to establish a policy, or at least a structured approach, designed to onboard new Trustees. This may include matching a new Trustee with an experienced Trustee and distributing a list of contact information and, perhaps, a brief description of the background/interests of the members.

Non-profit policy: Wendy reminded the Board that one of the goals of the Supporting Non-profits Policy is to protect the Library as it enters a relationship with a not-for-profit organization that seeks to support it. The principal instrument that protects the Library is a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Library and the not-for-profit organization. Before an MOU can be implemented, Trustee approval is required. Trustee approval is warranted only if the candidate not-for-profit organization has supplied the Library Director with complete documentation of its by-laws as well as any conflicts of interest. Wendy stated that Friends of Brownell Library has supplied this documentation. Sheila moved to recognize Friends of Brownell Library as a supporting not-for-profit organization. Helen seconded. Karen recused herself. Motion passed unanimously. Wendy stated that the Brownell Library Foundation has not supplied this documentation. Helen moved to table the vote on the Brownell Library Foundation until next month's meeting in the hope that the requisite documentation will be provided. The board requested Karen bring information regarding the repercussions of the Foundation not providing the documents and what that would mean specifically for the funds that the Foundation holds on behalf of the Trustees. Sheila seconded. Dottie and Karen recused themselves. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting time: April's meeting will be held at 6:30. During this meeting the Board will consider instituting 6:30 as the new meeting time.

Trustee picture: A group photo will be taken during the May meeting.

11. New Business: Wendy provided an update on the Library's progress toward the goals of the Strategic Plan. One of the goals is achieving a sustainable staff workload. To this end, the Library is moving to curated collections for new book orders—especially with regard to non-fiction; River is designing a new newsletter format; the library is moving to increased passive after-school programming for youth. Wendy also noted that the Library has surpassed 50% completion of the SLI certification process.
12. Adjournment: At 8:23 Dottie moved to adjourn. Sheila seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Minutes submitted by: Alex Carmical