Johnson Public Library Board of Trustees

Meeting Minutes, January 21, 2026

Temporary Library Space in the Masonic Temple

Present: Aurora River, Library Director. Kristen McDowell, Youth Services Librarian. Board Members: Kelly Vandorn, Suzanne Dodge, Jasmine Yuris, Sabrina Rossi, Eric Schulz

Community Members: Peter Hammond, Trista Tallman

1. **Call to Order:** Kelly called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

2. **Adjustments or Additions to the Agenda:** Jasmine noted that if additional individuals show up, have concerns and/or are anxious to help, wait until the end of agenda items to give opportunity to speak as questions may be answered during normal business discussion. Public Comment/Discussion added to bottom of agenda.

3. **Review and Approve the Minutes for the November 12th meeting:** Jasmine moved to approve minutes as drafted, Suzanne seconded, all board members in favor.

4. **Treasurer's Report**:
   a. Since November meeting took in $1500 in donations. Copley fund of $3700 received.
   b. Suzanne brought in report that she sent out to the town for town report and distributed copies.
   c. Kelly noted she talked briefly to Peter about the budget and there have been cuts to the budget because there are widespread cuts to make the budget balance. Building capital expense of $6000 was cut and building maintenance was decreased. Jasmine inquired regarding if Suzanne knew as the treasurer and Suzanne stated she was unaware of these changes. Jasmine inquired why wasn't the information communicated to Treasurer? It was unknown why the information wasn't shared directly with the treasurer. Peter Hammond explained the rationale behind the cuts to the library budget are in that with building of new building that there should not be capital expense on the library for the upcoming fiscal year and that it pertained just for the budget July 2026 – June 2027. Peter noted Selectboard will be approving budgets tomorrow night.
   d. Jasmine moved to approve Treasurer's report, Kelly seconded, all members in favor.

5. **Librarian's Report – Aurora**
    a. Aurora noted she had sent her report to the board via email that she had sent to the town for the town report.
    b. Library received a scholarship from Healthy Lamoille Coalition. Will be doing Norah Beads events with the funds: one at the high school and one in house. The scholarship was $300, so $150 will go toward each event. Norah Beads is a program that helps young folks talk about issues of mental health in a safe space.
    c. Very close to finalizing a "Long Life Learners" program every other week in February and March regarding specific issues related to aging. Food will be available and to run this program will be utilizing the Copley Fund money.
    d. Aurora has a volunteer coming to help with patronage and usage numbers for the last couple of years. Numbers are down and may be attributed to several factors. Aurora noted that there will be some visuals developed and if the board wants any specific visuals (pie charts, etc.) to let her know.
        i. Kristen stated that past reports were filed with VT Department of Libraries but cannot get into the account. Aurora noted software was on Baker and Taylor and that platform no longer exists. Working to retrieve data. Town reports may have some of the historical information as it was usually included. Kristen is going to look at historical town reports.
        ii. Two numbers that demonstrate numbers are down: 6750 patrons (2023) compared to 3075 patrons (2024). This is not a surprise, but is concerning. Librarians are focused on making programs now that bring people back. Tomorrow will start new tracking system so that on spreadsheet all numbers are present and accounted. Participation and involvement in the community programs that involve library will be logged diligently.
            1. Jasmine stated so great to have this energy. Aurora noted that for example they had a great turnout for coffee and conversations.
            2. Kelly noted knitting group move and if required? Kristen stated they asked to move due to dark and cold. Kelly asked if going well. Kristen noted there were 8 people and more interest has been expressed from additional participants.
        iii. Sabrina asked if the collaborative programs were logged with the numbers presented above such as all the offsite programs? Kristen showed tracking system and there were some recorded, but not all. Sabrina gave examples such as pizza nights and the fall university

programs that may be reaching more people than those numbers reflect. Aurora stated that it is a good to start early in the year so can document and be more reflective of what is happening onsite and offsite that the library contributes.

6. **Progress Report on New Library Building – Eric**
    a. Eric expressed the team was accustomed to Tom being so involved, not sure of processes yet with new town administrator. He provided example of the fill and discussions of too much or not enough fill and work to prevent potential quagmire in spring. John Sutherland, new Administrator, has been talking to Carl Rogers, economic development, working on coordinating the fill, but Eric is not sure where they are with that. Eric noted he introduced self to John and John inquired about finances, but not much else at the time.
    b. Eric does have some questions, but didn't want to bother Brian R. Questions included such as after Legion Field Meeting and provide power from vault location (now in the back corner) without duplicating things in the spring? Where were they looking for cost savings? They will get Paul and Brian together soon. Brian knows the numbers and what they are thinking. Considerations are being made such as canceling the heat pumps as Brian and other contractors/experts involved have stated it is the most expensive route. Eric noted he believed this had to do with something related to duct work (under floor instead of in the ceiling). Kelly considered there is one of the grants being looked into that is specifically for heating and cooling. Eric will review with Brian and can meet with engineers to discuss what can be cut without major revamp. Kelly stated this would be good as she is working on the full outline with questions answered for Selectboard and they are due in February.
    c. Eric reviewed that other items can be reconsidered. Example included the Cupola. Contractors can put in the structure but board over, reducing finish work. Potentially in later as funds are developed. Board discussed other areas to be reconsidered including reviewing cabinetry in the art room and the fireplace.
    d. Sabrina asked what were the main requirements for VT grant? She suggested these should be reviewed and ensure can complete grant requirements and open building for operations. Jasmine indicated all need to re-read the grant for a refresher. Kelly stated that Mark at VT Libraries said we can renegotiate grant and can request extension if needed. Jasmine expressed she hesitates to make part of narrative as urgency is in favor to complete the project by 12/31. Do not want to "pause" the project and kick down the road. Kristen stated she does not feel that postponement is a possibility. Currently Brian and crew are set to finish

by October. Board agreed we need to spend a lot of time talking about financial plan. Jasmine noted that Brian wants to be bothered by this project and does not know who to talk to and contact regularly.

   i. Kelly, when had meeting, builders suggested meeting every few weeks to address.
   ii. Foundation is mostly finished, but there is something outstanding. Eric not sure what needs to be done and will look into.
   iii. Kelly will reach out to Brian and Paul to establish need for meeting regularly again. Kelly will work to set up meeting.
   iv. Peter will get in touch with John and Carl to see if loop closing on communication.

7. Grant Budget Shortfall/VDOL Report – Kelly

a. VT Department of Libraries meeting happened yesterday. Mark was very kind and noted they will do all they can to help the library. Kelly walked away from meeting with a sigh of relief.
b. Kelly intended to bring the report that she completed with all cumulative expenses from October – November. However, she brought the wrong paper and will send email. In the meantime, Jasmine has the cumulative numbers and reported:
   i. Expenses total $1,238,642.08. Includes all bills except that Tatro has not sent in bill for 180,000.
   ii. The total anticipated bill will be around 2.4 million. Available funds we have are $1,936,750 million (Includes insurance, bank accounts, reserve funds, donation and everything). Insurance money was $166,997.44.
c. Board agreed need to campaign for $500,000 total.
d. Kelly notes keep in mind those totals do not include any cuts that are being proposed and evaluated. Those numbers are to build the building as designed now. Encourages not to change items such as quality windows and flooring during reconsiderations.
e. Kristen suggests sliding doors for children's rooms could be nixed now. It is a nice idea, but not essential for function and programming. Eric inquired if cabinetry line item covered bookshelves as well? Jasmine noted no, it was just enough to retrofit offices and was only the cabinetry in the art room so could be cut. Jasmine noted this is a potential for getting creative such as utilizing cabinets pulled out of other projects, utilizing volunteers, really looking at what have immediately available. Example – more shelving from the college if necessary.

f. Kelly inquired if board cuts items, how is contract negotiated for less money? Jasmine – good questions for meeting with Brian.

8. **Fundraising Status and Grant Status – Jasmine**
   a. Jasmine encouraged board to go into this confident and keep in mind that we are not a charity case, but we are giving individuals an opportunity and there are people that would like to take this opportunity.
   b. She talked with Eddie Gale (he works w/ foundation), but he said no his foundation does not do this type of work. However, he suggested meeting other potential donors and made a suggestion. Jasmine met w/ potential donor on Zoom meeting and she requested Jasmine send her the budget, current status, a patronage number (before flood, after flood, projected, narrative), any other grant information. Jasmine has not sent full information yet, just sent a narrative of the project. Suzanne, Jeanne, and Jasmine worked on the narrative. Jasmine is using Brian's numbers to retrofit budget. Once all submitted, the potential donor will get back to library in 3-5 weeks. Jasmine reflected that it was a really good experience with what funders are wanting for information.
   c. Jeanne and Jasmine met with Sarah Audsley (VT Studio Center) and she gave idea for development of appeal letter and to use same for everything the library is requesting for consistent language. Jasmine is developing this appeal letter and will also send on as part of package to potential donors. This consistent language is important as well as important for the board to communicate with each other all their activities related to grants, fundraising, etc.
   d. Consistent communication also important for tax payer information, town report, Go Fund Me, grants, side fundraising, etc. This appeal and letter from board of trustees can be put on Front Porch Forum and News and Citizen. Jasmine proposes based on her conversations that it is important for understanding that this gap is normal, we need to normalize it, and keep working to fill the gap. Note that most projects come up short around this time.
   e. Jasmine would propose that all hands-on deck situation. She cannot do both grants and fundraising. Suggest half of board work on fundraiser and half on grants.
   f. Jasmine also went to Craftsbury Library today and met with Susan. They built their library 20 years ago. Their fundraising included brackets and many items had someone's name such as benches, chairs, rooms, etc. They developed a beautiful book with handwritten notation in calligraphy of every single donation.

g. One idea is to develop a metal tree mounted on the exterior wall. The leaves on the trees can be recognized donations such as $250 - $500. All working together to make the library.
h. Peter Hammond had gathered capital campaign information from Paul and the steps. He had sent to Jasmine.
i. Jasmine inquired how board feels about Go Fund Me? Board was in favor. Jasmine started development but has not gone live. Propose all post on social media and start an email campaign once ready. Adrienne helped develop a beautiful interactive email letter. Plan to send far and wide as part of the campaign including all the people that saw the video after the move. Goal on Go Fund Me - $200,000. Chose Go Fund Me over sites such as Give Butter due to name recognition. Acknowledge that Go Fund me with take fees up to 15%.
j. Kelly inquired who would like to work with Jasmine? Aurora – feels better with relationship building and would prefer fundraising. Suzanne would like to help more with grants. Sabrina stepping down but will help with fundraising. Committee stands as Suzanne and Kelly on grants, Sabrina and Jasmine on fundraising with Aurora. However, Aurora will continue to do small work on grants and forward information. Jeanne will also continue to work on grants.
k. Jasmine asked the board about donation price points? Aurora is not in favor of naming room space after donors as she has encountered trouble down the road of "forever naming a space" for descendants, etc. Sabrina noted can still do price points but consider plaques or other modes of recognition that are retained with the building. Jasmine noted want to tug on the right heart strings. Board and librarians understand, but Aurora stated cannot put a "girdle" on the library and limit future growth. Therefore, have to be cognizant of donors and future changes to library which is inevitable.
l. Vermont Community Foundation (Alyssa, Holly): Jasmine worked with them and Alyssa forwarded on a few grants. Unfortunately each grant was around $5,000. Jasmine wrote back regarding the gap and talked to Holly. Holly requested some time and will reach back out to Jasmine, but Jasmine hasn't heard back yet.
m. Big thank you to Jasmine regarding footwork from board members.
n. Kelly and Aurora will be meeting with Back 40 Builders to discuss plans and next steps. Kelly will meet with Jeanne regarding grants. Jasmine and Sabrina will meet with Aurora regarding fundraising. Peter expressed there is a Selectboard meeting tomorrow night and he isn't fully sure why Library is on agenda, but can report back. He will express that Kelly has information regarding updates coming to the Selectboard by February 2nd.
o. Discussion regarding VT Department of Libraries Grant

i. Need to see in black and white requirements that there is no requirement to return money.
ii. Acknowledge that some folks are running on concern that something could happen a year from now and getting worked up about it now when fundraising hasn't been launched. Peter understands anxiety, people worried about tax bill. If we can take away that question regarding grant details and confidence in what will happen in one year, then a lot of minds would be put to ease.
iii. If the project is not done by 12/31/2026, it is believed the money must be returned. Will need an explanation on that as well and full clarification. The project is currently set to be finished in October, but details are important.
iv. Kelly commented that with the Holcomb House, Town had mortgage, then Historical Society made payments and paid off. An idea for the library to continue raising money and pay off if needed. Her understanding is that a bond is not needed to get mortgage? Because a town building, the selectboard would have to be on board with that. Might also be a solution and or a fall back plan. Kristen asked if that shared has been shared widely? Kelly noted that we should be confident in fundraising and only consider for fall back plans.
v. Jasmine stated that for grant writers might be important to seek grants with matching money. At selectboard meeting, Eben asked about "Reserve Match Fund" to Rosemary $530,000. Jasmine discovered most allocated for Jewett property, but may be some money that can be used as "Match Funds."

9. Trustee Positions Discussion

a. Kelly stated that Sabrina has expressed she will not be returning or re-running as her board position tenure is up this town meeting. Kelly asked how many candidates do we have for ballot? It was noted that currently Alex Laws is running and that Trista Tallman will be running. Eric will also be on the ballot.
b. Clarification provided: Currently there are two open spots since Sabrina's position is due and Eric must run to keep his position as he was appointed to the board when a vacancy occurred.

10. Unfinished Business

a. Linda sent a Thank you Card to the board which was viewed.

b. Sabrina – noted need to button up documents before her departure. She recommended the board close down Trello, centralize on Google Drive. She agreed to help train incoming trustee on documentation and would work with board to ensure accurate documentation is present for accessibility.
c. Kudos to Adrienne as librarians at Craftsbury have indicated JPL has the "Best website in the state".
d. Jasmine encouraged for the future that the board revisit Mission and Vision to envision as if we are already at the new location. A lot of grants ask for the mission and vision statements. Agreed begin at February Meeting, Sabrina will send on to all for review.
e. Kelly – all need copies of latest version of the building plan. Created copies for team.

11. **Public Comment/Discussion**: None needed.

12. **Adjourn**. Sabrina moved to adjourn, Jasmine seconded, all board members in favor. Adjourned 7:38 pm

Next Regularly Scheduled Meeting February 11th, 2026