

Meeting of the Westhampton Public Library Board of Trustees

October 8, 2020 via Zoom platform

Present: Anne Marie O'Reilly; Carol McMurrich; Mikki Nevins; Brian Mulvehill, Celeste Whiting; Lynn Cooper. Also present from the beginning until 7:35- Steve Holt.

1. **Call to Order** at 7:02: Roll Call

2. **Presentation from Steve Holt:** Regarding grounds care. Reviews history of his business: coming into the business, taking courses at STCC, learned a great deal about fertilizer and pesticides etc. Shares he does have a pesticide license to enable him to put pesticides on other people's lawns. Most current products break down in 2-3 weeks, so there are not enduring chemicals in the soil. Work on town lawns are to control crabgrass and weeds, which he does with gentle products which means there are some weeds/crabgrass but not as many. Has to time application of products so that it prevents plants from germinating. He uses a very small amount of pesticide. Fertilizers are nitrogen 16%, phosphorus 0% and potassium 6%. Phosphorus (which helps to form good roots) is not allowed unless it is new grass in tilled soil; fear is that it will leach if it's put on top. Notes: Lawns are not natural; a natural lawn would be a forest. A healthy lawn gets healthier and an unhealthy lawn gets worse. Because nutrients cycle back in. Plugging takes 5/8 holes out of soil- helps rain to go into the roots. Cuts lawn at 3-3.5 inches, to enable longer roots. Integrated pest management system: treat the areas that need treating. Works with UMass Extension Services. They have no agenda: aren't trying to sell you anything. Turf management is his passion! —Meaghan Schwelm asks: the products he mentioned (the 1906) would those be considered inorganic or organic? Answer: current products are inorganic. Issue with organic is that the cost is enormous. However, points out nitrogen is still nitrogen whether it's natural or man-made. Perhaps bigger issue is pesticide or not. —Celeste Whiting asks: Sounds like the Commonwealth has made a priority with Integrated Pest Management to minimize

application of chemicals by regulating what can be in there. Holt clarifies: IPM only applies what is needed where it's needed in very small quantities. Whiting: Is IPM by the Commonwealth or personal choice? Holt clarifies: He is trained to know how to do IPM which sets him apart from other lawn care people who lack the education to know how to do IPM. ———Brian Mulvehill asks: given what you put on the library lawn now, what're the chances of any of the things that are on the lawn running off into others' properties or getting into the water systems? Holt replies: Products don't have shelf life, so there is no leaching. It disappears and breaks down. Look at lawn and field: the field is 90% weeds and 10% grass. The products on the lawn are not leaching down and affecting that lawn.

———Anne Marie O'Reilly clarifies: there is a difference between the lawn and the field. Holt: yes, only does the lawn about twenty feet down from the terrace and around the building. The field does not receive any fertilizers or pesticides. Holt explains the first few years of the lawn there was no application of fertilizer or pest control. Annually Weed control step 2 and crabgrass control step 1. Step 3 and step 4 is fertilization which makes the weeds grow but he follows up with step 2 the next year. ———Brian Mulvehill asks: what are you thinking in terms of walking people around the grounds: Holt says he'd love to show people the lawn and the places where it's thriving and needs support. ———Meaghan asks: could Holt use less product than he's already using? Holt says that he could cut it back to wherever but it would create less fertile soil, because you'd be just taking from the soil but never giving back to it. ———Thank you very much Steve! (Steve Holt departs at 7:35) ———After Steve's departure, Mulvehill suggests we could have a public meeting with neighbors involved where Steve explains these things so that we are not explaining these things to other townspeople rather than us trying to explain what we do not fully understand. Nevins agrees with this idea.

— O'Reilly states that it does appear that the complaint was about pesticides and herbicides and the next step for our lawn care this fall was just fertilizer. Should we go ahead and allow him to do this?

— Schwelm says we should change the policy if we are going to do this. This does not impact our "green" status in terms of the building but it does go against what is written in our policy.

— Mulvehill circles back to the statement that Holt indicated that unless there was a downpour on the day of application it's highly unlikely that any runoff would affect abutters. Workshop could really explain that.

— O'Reilly says the earliest we could likely do this is spring 2021

— Cooper suggests a meeting with the small group of neighbors this fall to reassure them.

— Whiting asks if the letter was submitted by an abutter; O'Reilly answers that it was further down the hill. Whiting remarks it seem nearly impossible that runoff could reach. O'Reilly says the greater concern was about pollinators etc. Goal would be not to highlight people in particular but to provide people an opportunity to learn more about how the library grounds are maintained.

— Perhaps a letter should be sent to concerned neighbors to let them know this conversation is underway. O'Reilly did indicate to concerned neighbors that use of pesticides would stop.

— Celeste was asking if there was data about pollinators— O'Reilly said that the folks were concerned that the weeds might be good for the pollinators.

— Not sure how we'd set something like this up given that it's October.

— Schwelm chimes in that the concerned letter writer suggesting the pollinator-friendly community idea has already felt silenced. Idea has been tabled until the spring by the town. Concern is that their voices have not been given time and it may seem unfair to give Steve special air time.

Balance our stewardship in what we need to do to be environmentally responsible and manage the property.

Mulvehill: the idea of having Steve hold a workshop (in contrast with pollinators feeling left out) helps us to learn how to manage the property that we're in charge of but also make it open to the public so that individuals who have concerns can hear it from the source and not from us. But we need the info ourselves. McMurrich echos that this seems less confrontational: its almost an open trustees meeting that we invite the public to join us on. So it's not presenting an agenda but an opportunity for our own education.

Whiting: What's the purpose of the space? What purpose does it need to be fit to serve? We can't convert it to a pollinator space entirely. We can try to strike a balance to manage it in a way that meets the needs of the community.

— Mulvehill: perhaps should reach out to Steve and ask him what is a good time for him to do this- is it now or in the spring? And should we go ahead with step 3?

— Schwelm believes we should re-word the policy if we are going to decide to fertilize. She is willing to do it.

— Nevins suggests that we could hold off on fertilizing until the policy is amended.

— Mulvehill, Cooper, McMurrich, Whiting agree. Explain to Holt that until we can work on the policy and cross this hurdle we're going to put a hold on this so we don't get more letters. Trying to be aware of the sensitivity that is out there.

— Mulvehill recalls that the pollinator group was more invested in roadside mowing and less about the library. O'Reilly corroborates. Cooper recalls that Laurie Sanders was involved: asks should she come to talk to us? Mulvehill says pollinators are not our responsibility and we may not want to open ourselves to that at this point. We may want to ask the Selectboard about that since it was a town matter.

Action steps: 1. *Mikki Nevins* will call Steve Holt. Ask Steve when would be best timing for a tour and ask him to put a hold on fertilization for the time being. Will communicate with the trustees regarding Holt's response 2. When *Meaghan Schwelm* has time she can re-write the policy and we can look at it at another meeting.

2. **Minutes from last meeting:** Moved by Mulvehill to accept; Seconded and approved unanimously by roll call.

3. **Treasurer's Report:** Library Building account: \$3,594.48; State Aid is at 0.00; Deferred Town Monies \$78,318.93; Gifts \$23,716.51.

4. **Director's Report** as written, and: circulation stats are more normal which may have to do with browsing. Got a grant from American Library Association that will introduce native plants including those that are fruit bearing (like blueberries) to the library landscape. Highlights the grant that offers 1:1 match grants for exterior painting for historical buildings. Needs more research into this; may reach out to Barbara Pellissier and Phil Dowling for assistance regarding the history of the Judd house.

Biggest concern on this report is HVAC assessment: has no further information and does not know if there is a plan for service work in place. We need to upgrade some sort of filters. We have volunteers who feel more comfortable with open windows; this is also part of our general safety plan for open browsing. If we can't get the HVAC taken care of it's a problem not just for the public but also for library operations since it would limit the number of people in the library and would limit our ability to host volunteers. Trustees **encourage Schwelm to continue to contact the town** until this is resolved: and that she should indicate that services would need to be cut back if HVAC issue cannot be resolved. Whiting requests the information from the HVAC report so that trustees can weigh in on what is acceptable in terms of upgrades. **Schwelm should request this report** and share it with the trustees. Trustees may need to hold a special meeting to act quickly on this and Schwelm will communicate immediately if this needs to take place.

5. **Friends Report:** No report since last meeting.

6. Old Business

- a. Update on maintenance schedule and contractors: following up on the topic raised last month regarding the creation of a list of contractors that we have typically used in the past and a schedule for maintenance. Schwelm has contacted Maureen Dempsey and Phil Dowling and has determined that at least the furnace and likely other items are taken care of by the town. O'Reilly says this is meant to be a helpful resource to make it easier to know what to do when something goes wrong.
- b. O'Reilly brings up the issue of the fire alarm going off: should we discuss this again? Alarm went off again on Saturday. Nevins was called, and a police officer was present but the FD was not there because the alarm shut itself off so it was determined that there was no need to come. Then, security alarm went off at 3:30 AM due to the power outage. Seems to go off whenever there is an issue with power. O'Reilly suggests that just because we are the only town building that requires an alarm its frustrating that we are the ones that have to deal with the alarm— like the police or the fire. Nevins mentions police were there first. Cooper suggests that something is not right with the system and alarm company should come out to look at it. Whiting says this appears to be an artifact of how the town has been run over the years - we don't have a superintendent or property manager - we do not have the knowledge to deal with any situation anyhow. — Action item: Next meeting we will make a plan for how this will look.
- c. Decision and action on amending Trustees' by-laws to add position of "Co-chair" to list of officers — O'Reilly suggests we skip this item and table to next month due to time constraints (8:37 pm)

7. New Business

- a. Request for library to house Food Bank during cold weather months - we believe this is being held in the church and does not involve the library.

b. CFCE Outdoor Activities for Children - Pat Miller hoping to create an activity for kids that would be on the lawn- using water soluble spray paint on lawn to make hopscotch and obstacle courses. Needs Board of Health Approval but was hoping for our approval as well. Trustees approve.

8. Any other business to come before the meeting not anticipated
at time of posting. *None suggested.*

9. Continued discussion of informal review and evaluation process
for Library Director - move to November.

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 12th 2020 at 7 pm.

Adjourn: Cooper moves, Nevins seconds at 8:43 pm. Unanimously accepted.