

The Westport Library...

The Westport Library
Westport, Connecticut

Unapproved Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting
December 16, 2025

Members Present: Scott Bennewitz (Chair), Bob Boroujerdi, Sheri Gordon, Ben Chan, Peter Zakowich, Darcy Travlos, Anna Alemani

Members Absent: none.

Guest attending: Christy Charise, Randy Herbertson

Staff attending: Bill Harmer, Melanie Myers, Robin Powell, Tory Donohue and Meryl Kaplan

Scott Bennewitz opened the meeting at 4:50 pm.

Minutes – Approved from the November 18th meeting

FY 26-27 Budget – Draft Operating Budget

- Bill explained that the 1st draft of the budget is complete, not balanced at this time.
- Bill explained the things we are looking at for the FY26/27 budget.
 - a) What is absolutely essential?
 - b) What legacy items can we shrink?
 - c) What is it going to cost to execute strategic plan that was approved.
- Some concrete deductions were made.
 - a) Career Coach -PT position
 - b) Website PT position
 - c) Program support – PT.
 - d) Reduced IT Professional fees
 - e) \$100K in strategic costs removed from budget.
- The current gap (to balance) in the 1st draft is \$113K.
- We will need to phase in strategic goal costs.
- Bill explained positions that are desired but not in the budget at this time:
 - a) Director of Verso Studios
 - b) Technology – Consultant to support systems.
- Bill, Scott, Ben and Bob had a good meeting with the Town of Westport – Board of Finance, discussion was had about cost drivers, responsibility of growth, what the town funding covers and what the library supports.
- Discussion about what discretionary and non-discretionary are, trying to define clearly.

- Bill suggested an initial +2.99% increase in appropriations request, development is flat for now, it might be increased.
- Sheri Gordon would like to keep the Career Coach position and look to AI for other savings.
- The depreciation threshold needs to be decided. Should it stay at \$1000 or increased to \$5000.
- Bob floated a preliminary idea, subject to vetting and discussion, for the staff to potentially consider budgeting a Directors Fund to buffer the overages/underage that take place for reasons that cannot be budgeted in advance.
- Next Steps – budget meeting on January 8th, Budget vote @ Finance Comm meeting January 20th, Board Q & A on January 22th.

StoryFest

- Bill and Meryl presented a wrap up of the StoryFest Event
- Question of transparency and process – as the budget decreased from the original presented to the Finance Committee.
- Budget decreased due to postponement of Saturday Evening event; the event was rescheduled for May 2026.
- Programming is working on development of Storyfest for next year.

Board Designated Fund Purpose

- Scott explained the Board Designated Fund; it is a quasi-endowment used to cover a part of our operating expenses, traditionally at a 5% spend rate over a trailing three year average fund balance on June 30.
- Scott shared for discussion a Board Designated Proposal Outline which could be used for pilot initiatives, R&D projects, and start-up ideas or special projects (e.g. Strategic Plan Creation). This cannot and would not be used for ongoing operations; these would be for a max 18-month evaluation period. This would be in addition to the endowment funding of general operations.
- The proposal needs more discussion before it goes to the Board for a vote. Discussion continued to a later meeting.

Onboarding Plans for Amber

- Amber will be starting on January 2nd. Meryl will start the onboarding process that day.
- Meeting Bill and Melanie the following week.
- Nothing needed from the Finance Committee at this time.

Mid-Year forecast for January

- Forecast will need to be done in January after the December close
- We will have another insurance deductible due to the Riverwalk Flood that will need to be added to the forecast.

The meeting was adjourned for 6:02 pm

Respectfully submitted, *Meryl Kaplan*