

Special Act - Impact on Wellesley's Library Services

“In our democratic society, the library stands for hope, for learning, for progress, for literacy, for self-improvement and for civic engagement. The library is a symbol of opportunity, citizenship, equality, freedom of speech and freedom of thought, and hence, is a symbol for democracy itself.” - Vartan Gregorian

What is the Role of the Trustees?

- The Trustees are elected by the voters of Wellesley and are directly accountable to them. A Town Manager appointed by the Board of Selectmen would not have this level of accountability.
- As stated in the Massachusetts Library Trustee Handbook¹, Library Trustees have responsibility for oversight of the Library through:
 - Employment of the director
 - Adoption of policies and plans, and
 - Budget
- The current governance structure is based on MGL Chapter 78, Section 11, which states in part, **“The Board shall have the custody and management of the library and the reading room and all property owned by the town relating thereto. All money raised or appropriated by the town for its support and maintenance shall be expended by the board.”** Chapter 78 is contained within Title XII, the Education section of MA General Laws, *not* Title VII which covers the powers and duties of cities and towns and basic services like planning, zoning, etc. The Library is a special institution, similar to the public schools, and like them requires additional layers of protection, because it protects a citizen’s right to access information.
- The Library Trustees currently have fiduciary responsibility to BOTH the town and library donors. The Library Trustees oversee a number of legacy trust funds and special accounts.

¹ The Library Trustees Handbook is produced by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), the agency of state government with the statutory authority and responsibility to organize, develop, coordinate, and improve library services throughout the Commonwealth. The MBLC was established in 1890 under Chapter 78 of the Massachusetts General Laws and is governed by nine Commissioners appointed by the Governor.

What are the problems with the Special Act?

- The Special Act proposal fails to recognize that the library is an institution within the town, not simply a town department. The Wellesley Free Library is a complex institution, governed by state, regional and professional requirements.
- The Special Act removes virtually all authority from the Library Trustees, making it difficult for them to carry out their mission. The Special Act removes powers granted to the Library Trustees in MGL Chapter 78, Section 11, namely:
 - The Library Director will be hired by the Town Manager with limited input from the Library Trustees. He/she will report to the Town Manager, be evaluated by the Town Manager, and can be fired by the Town Manager.
 - The Town Manager will have the ability to cut specific library programs and services through the budgeting process.
 - The library budget will be presented to Advisory and Town Meeting as part of the Town Manager's consolidated budget, reducing the ability of the Library Trustees to advocate for the needs of the Wellesley Free Library.

The Library Trustees are envisioned in the Town Manager proposal as a policy-making body only. But no entity can implement policy without control over staff or budget.

Why is this bad for the Wellesley Free Library?

- **Most towns in the Commonwealth recognize that library Trustees need to have management authority in order to protect library services.** In over 86% of towns with elected Library Trustees, those Trustees have supervisory authority over the Library Director.
- **Increased centralized bureaucracy is diametrically opposed to needed flexibility.** The Library is a town service that residents use by choice. The Wellesley Free Library is assessed against neighboring libraries, bookstores, the Internet, and local cultural organizations. Good customer service is a requirement. Complicating this, the way patrons of the 21st century are using libraries is rapidly evolving. The organization must be flexible, and able to adapt to changing customer needs.
- **The Library operates under unique state guidelines and has multiple requirements for certification.** In order to be certified (which gives patrons access to the Minuteman Library Network and the Wellesley Free Library access to state grants and state aid – around \$40,000 in FY15), the Wellesley Free Library must meet specific state requirements for material spending, budget increases, hours/days open,

and staff. The library submits annual financial reports to the State to verify that it meets the requirements.

- **The Trustees are responsible for strategic direction, not just policies.** The Wellesley Free Library is required to submit a 5-year plan to the state, which is then required to be updated annually.
- **The Trustees have a fiduciary responsibility to donors.** Roughly 20% of the library budget each year is funded through donations. Donors give in order to enhance the services at the library, not to replace tax dollars. Trustees advocate for library interests within town government which helps to maintain tax funding for core services. Much of what residents associate with the excellence of the Wellesley Free Library (computer classes, programs, new material formats) is only possible because of donations. No other department in Town relies to this extent on donations. Donors need confidence that their donations will be spent prudently.
- **The Trustees serve as a buffer between staff and Director during union negotiations.** Department supervisors are part of the staff bargaining unit. Only the Library Director, Assistant Library Director, IT Director, and Administrative Assistant are not in a staff union. It is important for the ongoing operations of the library that the staff understand that it is the Elected Trustees on the other side of the bargaining table, not simply the Library Director and senior Town staff.
- **There is no value to the Library Director in having career mobility within the town – Being a Library Director is a profession.** Library Directors have a specialized degree (Masters in Library Science) and training. They move from library to library, not within the town.

Is the current system of government working?

- **The Wellesley Free Library is one of the most respected libraries in the State and is a “town department of departments.”** Our library circulates more items per capita than any of the 20 largest libraries in the state. Each year, over 370,000 patrons visit and over 243,000 books are circulated and 1200 residents take advantage of Library programs. Over 60 employees work at the library, which is open 7 days per week (even during snowstorms). In spite of this heavy traffic, the main library building looks as good as it did on the day it opened, over 11 years ago. Last year the Massachusetts Library System (MLS) bestowed the first ever “Stronger Together Award” upon the Wellesley Free Library. This award celebrates a Massachusetts library or group of libraries, an individual or group of individuals, or a professional organization that contributes to strengthening the Massachusetts library community.
- **The Library successfully collaborates with virtually every Town department and community organization.** Programming is coordinated with the Council on Aging, the Wellesley Public Schools, the Recreation Department, and the Wellesley

Sustainable Energy Committee, to name a few. Wellesley Media is a strong partner in the advancement of technology at the Library. “Wellesley Reads” are coordinated with Mass Bay Community College and the World of Wellesley. And, the successful English as a Second Language program was created in collaboration with the Fund for Wellesley and Wellesley Friendly Aid. At the Wellesley Free Library collaboration is the way we do business.

- **The Wellesley Free Library is a large, active, successful operation – a town department of departments:** Over 60 employees, and over 370,000 patron visits last year. The library is open 7 days a week, even during snowstorms.

FAQs

- Do the Library Trustees oppose the concept of a Town Manager?
 - The Library Trustees support improvements in Town Government that would lead a more effective government for Wellesley. We have specific concerns about the current proposal as it impacts the Library.
- Can the current bylaws be amended to fit the needs of the Wellesley Free Library?
 - Yes. The Library Trustees believe that bylaw changes can be written in such a way that the Wellesley Free Library can continue its tradition of excellence.
- Are there any overarching concerns of the Library Trustees?
 - On March 15th, citizens of Wellesley will be asked to decide if they are in favor of Wellesley moving to a more centralized form of government associated with the hiring of a Town Manager. This change would be a significant one for Wellesley. There is an enormous amount of documentation to digest in an extremely short period of time. While many citizens might view the general recommendation as advantageous, there are many details in the implementation that need to be made in way that is consistent with the goals of our community. As they say, “The devil is in the details.” The Library Trustees urge everyone to take the time to truly understand what this change in government would mean for our community.

Key Facts about the Wellesley Free Library

Library Usage in FY15

Total Main Library circulation was thriving as 743,337 items were checked out. The circulation statistics reported above only describe one piece of the picture in measuring library use. Other statistics of interest for FY15 are:

- 371,568 visits to the Main Library
- 13,226 visits to the Branch Libraries
- 110,256 reference questions answered by phone, email, and through the website
- 24,384 children attended 585 children's programs
- 7,637 people attended 635 general interest, teen programs and computer classes
- 731,947 visits were made to the Library' website www.wellesleyfreelibrary.org
- 25,701 electronic checkouts through Overdrive (a 68% increase over FY14)
- 17,733 Wellesley residents with library cards.

The Library's Collection

In FY15 total library holdings are as follows:

- 243,446 books
- 66,894 eBooks
- 20,260 audio cassettes and CDs
- 19,995 DVDs

The library also offers access to 8035 audio titles in a downloadable format from the website, 254 magazines and 47 databases.