

**Bedford Free Public Library
Library Trustees Agenda
Tuesday, January 20, 2026
7:00 PM**

Hybrid: In-Person and Online

Join the Zoom Webinar:

Webinar link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81639242953>

Telephone: 646-931-3860

Webinar ID: 816 3924 2953

In attendance: Gyasi Burks-Abbott, Padma Choudry, Rachel Field, Renae Nichols, Elizabeth Hacala, Mike Pulizzi, Emily Prince (minutes)

Other attendees: Jaclyn Powers, Library Director; Alyssa Staples, Assistant Director, Dot Bergin, Bedford Citizen; members of the public.

Call to Order: Padma Choudry called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm. A quorum of the Board of Trustees was present at the time the meeting was called to order; Emily Prince arrived late.

Public Comments: None

Secretary's Report from 12/9/2025

A couple of corrections to the elevator repair and Town Charter discussions were made, as well as non-substantive corrections. The minutes were amended accordingly. Renae Nichols moved to accept the Secretary's Report from 12/9/2025, as amended. Mike Pulizzi seconded. Motion passed. Vote: 5-0-1.

Director's Report

Jaclyn Powers clarified that the town budget was presented to Finance Committee, but has not been approved. She provided an overview of recent staffing changes and recent donations. Elizabeth Hacala moved to approve the Director's Report; Rachel Field seconded. Motion passed. Vote: 6-0-0.

Strategic Plan Update

Jaclyn Powers provided an update on the strategic plan. She noted that the first community focus group met last week and had four attendees. There are focus groups scheduled for parents, teens and remote workers in the coming weeks. The Advisory Committee recently did a visioning exercise. The final Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for May 19, 2026. Padma Choudry asked about whether Jaclyn attempted to engage non-users of the library. Due to a focus on other groups, non-users have not been targeted, but Jaclyn offered to try to engage them. There was a brief discussion of engagement with seniors and the Hanscom community. After the focus groups meet, the next step will be drafting a Mission Statement, Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Action Items. The anticipated timeline for approval is May/June 2026, with an effective date of July 1, 2026.

Modification to Agenda

A suggestion was made to prioritize the library hours and charter and bylaw discussions. The following agenda items will be discussed at the February 10, 2026 meeting:

- Posting/Distributing Materials policy
- Security Camera policy

Proposed Changes to Charter & Bylaws Update

Padma Choudry provided an overview of the Charter and Bylaw issue. Several years ago, the Town Assessor was not performing to satisfaction, so the Board of Assessors sought assistance from the Town Manager in handling the performance issue. Consequently, the Town Charter was amended to give the Town Manager hiring, firing and supervisory authority over the Assessor. In 2025, a Charter & Bylaw Committee was formed to review the existing charter and propose amendments. This process occurs every five years.

In July 2025, after discussing with the Library Trustees at their meeting, Padma Choudry, Elizabeth Hacala, and Emily Prince met with Paul Mortenson, Select Board Chair, and Matt Hanson, Town Manager, to discuss the proposed Charter Amendment. The amendment included giving the Town Manager hiring, firing and supervisory authority over the Health Director, Planning Director and Library Director. The rationale for the proposal was that the Town Manager is better equipped to handle HR matters and disciplinary issues that may arise in alignment with the prior change in authority over the Assessor. It was noted that the Library Trustees recently hired a new Library Director, in consultation with HR and the Town Manager. There were no challenges to this process at that time. It was noted that the current process had been working well and the Library Trustees felt strongly that the library should maintain its independence. The Select Board chair and Town Manager indicated that they would remove the Library Director from the proposed amendment.

Following these discussions and agreement that the amendment to give the Town Manager power to hire, fire, and supervise heads of departments would exclude the Library, the Select Board Chair notified Padma Choudry that town counsel had just issued an opinion stating that the Town Manager already possesses hiring, firing and supervisory authority over the Library Director, Planning Director, Health Director and Superintendent, and that the proposed amendment was no longer needed because now the new interpretation was that the Town Manager had those powers under the existing charter already.

Padma Choudry appeared in front of the Select Board, questioning Town Counsel's new interpretation and timing, given the history of the town, precedent (as the Library had just hired a new Director, just as they had in the past), and the fact that Town Counsel had required the amendment in 2019 to give that power to the Town Manager over the Assessor, indicating that the power was not included in the charter. She also asked why the amendment did not include the School Superintendent under the Town Manager's purview. The response was that the schools are different for the following reasons: (i) School Committee can hire their own attorney, (ii) schools have a separate personnel department and (iii) School Committee has control over their budget.

The Library Trustees could present a citizen's petition at Town Meeting, or work with the Charter & Bylaw Review Committee to modify the charter. The Select Board Chair also noted that a second opinion was rendered which confirmed town counsel's opinion.

Padma Choudry requested a copy of the second opinion from KP Law, which proved to be verbal.

Elizabeth Hacala, Rachel Field and Mike Pulizzi attended the January 14, 2026, Charter & Bylaw Review Committee. They provided a recap of the meeting. It was noted by the Committee that the schools should be excluded and are different from the town library. The Trustees present explained that the Library Trustees are qualitatively different from the Board of Health and Planning Board. The library is a separate building, has a significant budget and the Trustees serve as the fiduciaries of the library. Furthermore, moving the hiring, firing and supervisory authority under the Town Manager creates an opportunity for the Town Manager to drive policy. It was noted that microaggressions are real and could pressure one to leave a position. The Select Board Chair was not receptive to arguments in favor of the Library Director remaining independent from the Town Manager. Members of the Charter & Bylaw Review Committee did not take a position.

There was discussion regarding what constitutes a critical town function and that the charter language lacks clarity. It can be argued that the library is not considered a necessary and critical town function as defined in the charter. It was also noted that the town bylaws specifically state the Library Trustees hire, fire and supervise the Library Director. While the Charter can override if there is inconsistency, the existence of the language in the bylaws clearly suggests the intent of the existing charter that the Library Director is independent from the Town Manager and should not be retroactively interpreted as inconsistency.

The Library Trustees requested to present their position to the Charter & Bylaw Review Committee. It was suggested that the Library Trustees write a statement in support of independence that is submitted into the record at the next Charter & Bylaw Committee meeting. The Trustees agree that it is appropriate to consult with the Town Manager on HR issues and have done so in practice over the past forty years, including for the recently hired Director. It is critical that Trustees maintain independence over the Library Director to honor voter choice.

The Trustees discussed various ways to proceed in support of their position. Ideas included (i) Citizens' Petition; (ii) Amendment on Town Meeting Floor; (iii) Memorandum of Understanding clarifying that the Trustees will work in consultation with the Town Manager on any HR issues, as historically done. The deadline for submitting a citizen's petition for the March 23, 2026, Annual Town Meeting has passed. It was clarified that charter amendments can be made on town floor at Town Meeting; bylaw amendments cannot be made at Town Meeting. It was noted that next steps will depend on how the Charter & Bylaw Review Committee proceeds with the proposed amendment.

The Trustees reviewed the existing town organization chart and noted that the Library Trustees are independent from the Town Manager. The organization chart appears inconsistent with town counsel's recent charter interpretation. There was discussion of Trustee attendance at the January 21, 2026 Charter & Bylaw Review Committee meeting and scheduling a meeting with the Select Board Chair and Town Manager. Padma Choudry had already let the Town Manager and Select Board Chair know that she was unavailable for the Committee meetings, but requested an alternative time to meet. It was agreed that Padma Choudry will send the letter previously submitted to the Select Board in favor of Library Trustees' position to the Charter & Bylaw Review Committee. Emily

Prince will present a statement to the Charter & Bylaw Review Committee summarizing the Trustees' position on their behalf at the next meeting later this week, despite that many of the other Trustees were unavailable at this time, and request that the Committee postpone voting on the proposed amendment until a meeting between the Board of Trustees and the Charter & Bylaw Review occurs.

Elizabeth Hacala moved that the Trustees formally endorse Emily Prince to bring the letter and supporting documents to the January 21, 2026 Charter & Bylaw Committee meeting and request a future meeting of the respective parties. Renae Nichols seconded. Motion passed. Vote: 6-0-0.

Proposed Reduction in Open Hours

Jaclyn Powers looked at other iterations of reduced hours. She determined that the one previously presented was most aligned with the library's traffic patterns and would optimize the delivery of services. There was general agreement that Monday is the quietest night. Jaclyn Powers confirmed that no staff will see a reduction in their hours. Staff schedules will shift slightly, which will allow for optimal use of staff. It was confirmed that the reduced library hours will not impact state aid. The schedule change is unlikely to impact circulation. The lockers will allow patrons the ability to pick up materials outside of operating hours. The new schedule would go into effect on July 1, 2026. Mike Pulizzi moved to approve the proposed reduction in Bedford Free Public Library hours effective July 1, 2026. Rachel Field seconded. Motion passed. Vote 6-0-0.

Adjournment

Padma Choudry noted that the discussion of the policies governing posting/distributing materials and security cameras in the library will be discussed at the February 10, 2026, meeting.

Elizabeth Hacala moved to adjourn; Renae Nichols seconded. Motion passed. Vote: 6-0-0. Meeting adjourned at 8:58 pm.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, February 10, 2026 at 7:00 pm.