

Meeting - Sept. 6, 2023

Location: Church of the Good Shepherd, Episcopal

Attendees: Joanne Perez, Matt Hodgkiss, Jim Jensen, Meta Vornehm, [Kristy Besada](#)Kim Hester, Karl Hester, Nancy Meyer, Karla Tolomeo, Allison Palm, Jennifer McCormick (Nashua Public Library), Kathy Boss, John Rowntree, Becky Green.

Joining via zoom: [Kelly Turney](#), Blake Tyler (GSOP), William Manseau, Jocelyn Sharp-Henning, Judie Bryant, Miranda Melson (Bridges), Robert Cote (HHHC)

Small group question: What would your teenage self think about your parents insisting on knowing what books were available to you.

Presentation: Specific requests to the Nashua Public Library with reference to religion.

Jennifer McCormick, Director of the Nashua Public Library

Handout to start: Library Strategic Plan

43 staff positions

130,000 physical books

Shared digital collection across the state (75,000 titles)

Busy building - 1500 daily visitors, 1700 uses of meeting rooms by community groups, study rooms used by a variety of community members, including some unhoused folks who come in for some private time (which does bring in some problems, but we welcome them). Busy children's room with 5 or 6 story times a week. We have support for families such as parent networking, programming for immigrant and refugee parents.

Some new programs: A seed library, puzzle swap, a visible mending group, developing a 'library of things' and planning 'a maker space with 3D printer, cricket, computer with sound mixing software, a sewing machine.

We are engaged in active listening to learn what the community needs and how we can respond.

A major principle espoused by the American Library Association, (we are a member), is 'we value the freedom to read.' Provide what is interesting and enriching for members of the community. Our job is not to decide what a community should read.

Current climate: Three formal challenges in the past year, two individuals have gone beyond talking to the staff, to the director, writing letters, submitting forms to call for review). Two were about books dealing with transgender situations. A third was regarding a book about the Bible that took a fundamentalist position and the person takes a more liberal position. Basically the book says 'if you are not a christian you are going to go to hell'. In these cases the Library decided that policies were followed and no changes were merited. One person appealed to the board of the library and the board backed up the Library's decision.

At every board meeting a couple of people come with books pulled from the shelves of the children's room to say these books should not be available to children. These deal with sexuality and are offensive to me. Statements are made that the library is not responding to feedback and is unwelcoming to christian families. Complaints were made about a display with butterflies and conservation theme in April instead of a display focused on Easter. This week the board was asked to stop being members of the American Library Association because we are grooming children with sexual content where it does not belong.

Meeting moved to discussion with NAIC members providing our input & feedback – is the library meeting the needs of our communities and respectful of our various beliefs?

Kim Hester: There are different shades of christianity - I wonder which voices? I am sorrow for you that people are being hurtful.

Karla Tolomeo: There is no such thing as one size fits all. And libraries exist to education people. If there is something I do not know, I expect the library to provide resources to educate. I am free to disagree with what I read.

Meta: This group skews to be very open and interested in other viewpoints. But I have learned that if one person complains several others probably are thinking the same thing, but are keeping quiet.

Kathy Boss: Secular institutions tend to avoid religious references. Maybe in April there could be a display that reflects the variety of religious celebrations like Easter, Passover, . . . You should not favor any one religion, but can you acknowledge that religion is a significant part of many of our lives.

Allison Palm: My family uses the library frequently. You do a really good job showing the diversity of holidays. As clergy we get feedback frequently. It is true about hearing a voice when others think the same but do not speak, but also, we don't hear from people who are happy and support what we are doing. I am glad you are here so many of us can tell you we are happy with what you are doing.

Kristy: I have been thinking about what type of book would upset me. It would be ones that involve violence toward marginalized groups. 'How to be a white supremacist' I might ask 'what is this and why is it here'

Jen: What would programming look like that dealt with religion without focus on a single one? How could we collaborate?

Allison: at one time you had a preschool fair - maybe you could do a church/religion fair? Have a table for each of several faith communities.

Karl: a program could allow different religious leaders to present what they have in common, such as taking care of people.

John: could do a lecture series with supporting material, such as Islam.

Kathy: had HS students do a project on sacred poetry using sources from Hindu texts, Psalms, Transcendental works, sanskrit.

Kristy: most of us would make ourselves available for this type of programming. The library does not have to develop the content.

Discussion moved to a short sidebar around unhoused persons and the library:

Jen: Most of these folks have a substance abuse problem. We have full time security now but will have none in two weeks because one guard retired and the other one took a new job elsewhere. It takes steps to engage individuals at the door, greet them and stop ones who can't be successful because they are intoxicated or are coming in furious - not today, come back in few hours or tomorrow. Call law enforcement much less than in the past. Have relationships with folks working with these people.

John: Table this for now - we are likely to have a meeting of NAIC around the situation of unhoused people downtown.

Kim: How can we support you? Should we come to your board meetings?

Jen: that would be helpful, but not every meeting, our board members are not totally connected to the community.

Kim: If there is a time you need us - give us a call.

Meta - Treasurer's report:

Main Account - \$ 2135.13

Crop Walk - \$ 934.91

Choir - \$ 484.27

First Baptist church as submitted dues, forms were handed out.

Link will be available on website soon.

Becky Green - Crop Walk is Sept. 22nd

St. John Newman will no longer be a local agency.

Announcements:

Nashua Multicultural Festival is this Sunday Sept 10th at 10 am. We will have table staffed by Rabbi Jon

The Thank You Project Water Walk is Saturday, September 16th at 9 am at Greeley Park, at the stage. For more information please go to www.thankyouproject.org/water-walk-registration.

Proceeds go to build wells in Nigeria where women and kids walk over 5 miles to get dirty water. We are raising funds for well #7!

Interfaith Housing Justice Group on Oct 2nd at 7:30pm at UU Church of Nashua hosting a forum on housing for candidates for alderman and mayor. We will have stories about housing and opportunities to question candidates. Full announcement to come via email.