

Rye Public Library Board of Trustees meeting – July 15, 2025

Minutes for Public Session

Present: Trustees JoAnn Hodgdon, Julie Tucker, Victor Azzi, Michael Moody and Joe Marttila

Additional attendees: Director Richmond, town attorney, 10 Rye citizens

Held in conference room at Partner's Bank; meeting was not live streamed

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Hodgdon at 9:00 am. Pledge was said.

Meeting commenced with public comment first on the agenda.

- A group of citizens presented a letter to the library board, requesting improvements to meeting management and compliance with RSA-91a, and expressing disappointment that nothing has yet been done to remedy the impression that the library board is against supporting and including families of LGBTQ youth in library programming.
- A citizen spoke sharing that he had watched the video from the last meeting and was compelled to attend to state that he felt the behavior of the employees was rude, and that it made him question who is in charge of the library. He stated he perceived the employee comments as rude and an act of activism, stating they are acting as activists for a small segment of the community rather than as employees. He cited his personal expertise as a business man dealing with disgruntled employees.
- Another citizen inquired why today's meeting is held at the bank instead of at the library. The Trustee Chair responded that there was an HR issue to be discussed and they were concerned about the live stream. It was noted that in the future the live stream could simply be turned off for the non-public portion of the meeting as is done for other town meetings in similar scenarios.
- A town select board member spoke, noting that he was proud of the trustees for how they have handled this situation, and that in his opinion the public on both sides of the issue is causing the volunteer board too much stress. He also noted that when he watched the video of the 6/17 meeting he saw that people were praising some board members and criticizing others and he felt that was inappropriate and that the board should be seen as one governing body.
- Another Rye resident spoke, commenting that she does appreciate the work the board does and understands the difficulties and that they are trying their best. She noted that if they sensed there was an emotional response to their decision by some parents, it

was because things that harm our children are personal and upsetting, and so that would naturally result in an emotionally charged response.

9:14 am – public comment period ended

9:14 am to 11:48 am – non-public session (Reasons for non-public session were stated as “some HR and other non-public issues to discuss”. It was indicated that they would resume public session to discuss those earlier agenda items, but not at a set time).

11:49am – recommencement of public session. One member of the public remained in attendance.

Board chair opened discussion regarding the letter the group of citizens had delivered earlier.

Link to aforementioned letter: [RPL Trustees Ltr.6.17.25 V1.docx](#)

- Board chair commented that they intend to discuss the need to review and revise all library policies soon.
- The board chair noted that the letter would not be included in the public meeting minutes as the attorney had advised that minutes not include attachments.
- A citizen asked where members of the public would find such attachments and the board responded that any attachments handed to them at meetings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the library, available to the public via right to know requests.
- Board chair noted that the topic of the public response to the postponement and other handling of the NH Outright event was not on the July agenda as they hadn't had time to discuss outside of the meeting whether it should be on the agenda or not
- The board agreed they could work with the town hall to make sure board meetings are cross-posted on the town calendar on the website.
- The board discussed the logistics of choosing a set day of the month for meetings and a process to announce changes, rather than setting the meetings monthly at the end of that month's meeting, as has been the practice. They discussed the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month at 9:00am as a proposed option, but no decision was made at this time.
- Board chair shared that they had had further discussions about the possibility of evening meetings but it is just too difficult for them because of the length of the meetings. She suggested that if citizens want to participate but are inhibited because

of jobs or other conflicts, they can always submit a letter to the Library Director's email address to be read at the meeting, and they can watch back the live streams.

- They also addressed the request for more detail in meeting minutes, noting that their legal advice obtained recommended minutes only reflect actions taken and decisions made, not any further detail about discussions leading up to decisions and actions. Advice was that the ability to watch back the live stream if folks are curious about what transpired is sufficient. (Board secretary noted that in situations, such as today, where no live stream is being recorded, she would do her best to capture more detail.)
- The board chair then shared that they had discussed a lot about the postponement and response during this morning's non-public session.
- As a result of that non-public discussion, they shared that they will not be issuing any follow-up statement about the postponement of the Allyship 101 event. They reported there had been no motion to issue a response and so no vote was recorded.
- Board chair and secretary then spoke at length, though vaguely, about security concerns that they feel added to the need to postpone the event.
- A citizen asked if those security concerns were part of the discussion and evident before the event was postponed or only after, and the response was after.
- A citizen asked for clarification about the source of those concerns.
- Board secretary shared that the security concern was a voicemail threat made to someone who is an acquaintance of someone she knows, that they had played a voicemail recording of the threat to her and she relayed this to the board verbally.
- A citizen asked how this incident was documented.
- The board shared they assumed it was reported to the police – they were unsure whether it was the Portsmouth or Rye police and felt any such report would be confidential and therefore had not sought any further substantiation.
- Board chair noted that in addition to safety issues, they became concerned about the organization's request to have folks register for the event, for the stated purpose of awareness of any "known bad actors" that might try to disrupt the event. It was clarified that this occurred after the postponement and had not been a concern that they had discussed as a reason before.

- Board chair noted that they had put a lot of work into this issue, and her concerns that the public didn't understand what a large amount of info or difficult discussions they had, noting that if those discussions could have been public it would be easier.
- Board secretary noted they will be taking a class to better understand RSA-91a
- The board discussed that it was frustrating their original intent was only to postpone the event, but some construed it as cancelled.
- A citizen suggested that the public concern was not about the differences between a postponed or canceled event, but rather the reason the board statement gave for the postponement – that it was postponed on ideological grounds. The citizen stated that by barring one group from using the library on ideological grounds, they are not “remaining neutral” but rather taking a clear side. The board secretary noted that this is only this resident's opinion.
- Board chair mentioned that part of the issue prior to the postponement was the wording on the sandwich board placed outside the library. That it declared “Be an ally!” as though the library was instructing citizens how to behave/think. Initial discussion included whether or not they could just re-word the sandwich board, but they decided since the event was about being allies only, and not about also how not to be allies, that rewording the sandwich board would not suffice, and that the event would need to be postponed until this could be resolved.
- One board member shared that he had wanted to hold an informational session about offshore wind energy and had been told no, and felt this was similar and “keeping fair”.
- A citizen asked for clarification on what equivalence he was drawing between windmills and LGBTQ youth and their families, at which point he clarified he felt it was that there were similar safety issues at play, and also he didn't hold a protest when he was told no.
- Another board member noted that the amount of back and forth they have had on this issue is more than to be expected by the public of a public board, and that there is no apology forthcoming because there is nothing they need to apologize for. Board chair agreed they had tried their best and should not have to apologize for that.
- The board chair commented that they don't need to make a statement reconfirming that everyone is always welcome at the library, as it says that in the mission statement which “can be read right when you enter the door”.

- A citizen noted that earlier actions had an appearance of contradicting this statement which is in her opinion what led to this back and forth in the first place.

The meeting continued with a discussion of other agenda items:

- The HVAC system and some repairs to the grounds that involve cast-iron grates around some trees where the trees have outgrown the grates, requiring the grates to be repaired at some expense.
- Finances, with the treasurer asking about moving funds from a CD to fund the HVAC and construction project, depending on the timing of those anticipated bills.
- It was mentioned that Star Island Builders has been selected as the contractor for the construction project.
- It was noted that the Trustee of Trusts has not provided financial reporting or disbursements now for two quarters, and discussion of whether the recently hired town finance director will be able to help with this issue.
- The trustees noted that there is a DPW meeting on July 30 about a Washington Road improvement project and that two trustees would attend to be the ears of the board at that meeting.
- There was a motion to retain the services of the town's attorney moving forward, with a unanimous vote in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 12:45 pm

*Please note that as of 5:35 pm July 27, 2025 the board secretary has yet to post the minutes of this meeting*