

Editorial

Reject the recall

Ashby is facing its first recall election in many years, as three library trustees stand to lose their seats for what comes down to building a library some consider ugly and for firing an employee they insisted wasn't doing her job.

A recall is an extreme step and should be reserved for extreme cases, most specifically such as when an elected official has committed an act of malfeasance while serving in their capacity as an elected official, or even if they break the law as a citizen.

There was no crime of malfeasance committed by the sitting members of the Ashby Board of Library Trustees.

If this recall passes then it sets a bad precedent.

Library Trustee Matthew Alfond had it right in a recent interview.

Alfond said if the recall succeeds then it will discourage other people from stepping forward to volunteer for these boards. A volunteer does not want to have his or her reputation dragged through the mud in a community after working hard to accomplish a task.

The library may not have the perfect exterior. It may not be the Taj Mahal of Ashby, but that is not what residents were asking for, and this building is what the town had the money to fund.

While the citizenry may have conflicting opinions about whether Marja LePoer was performing her duties as library director, those who hired her, oversaw her performance reviews and worked with her in the library — the trustees — are the ones who make that determination.

It is not fair to kick people out of office because you don't like the look of the building or you disagree with their personnel decisions.

If any of the three incumbents lose their seat on the board, not only does the town lose their service to the library, but to the town as well for the foreseeable future because Ashby bylaws prohibit a recalled official from being elected or appointed to another town position for two years.

Ashby residents should take the opportunity to make their voices heard by turning out at the polls at Ashby Elementary School on Tuesday, Dec. 19, from noon to 7:30 p.m.

Letters to the Editor

Ashby candidates raise questions of incumbents

To the Editor:

There are few if any who doubt that the historic Ashby Free Public Library building lacked handicapped access, in need of more room for its collections and patrons, and needed substantial infrastructure improvements. It was admirable that The Ashby Free Public Library Board of Trustees (BOT) took on the task of rectifying these deficiencies. However, the manner in which this task was undertaken and executed is an illustration of poor communication and obfuscation.

The BOT may have followed the letter of the law in the execution of their expansion project, but certainly not the spirit of it! If they had, everyone in town would have been aware of their expansion proposal well in advance of its construction. Ashby residents would have been actively solicited for their opinions and concerns regarding its use, configuration, and physical appearance. They would have been aware of the project's costs as well as important milestones in the planning and design process. The outcome would have been a project that the entire town could have supported with open enthusiasm. However, any concerns, thoughts, or suggestions that were brought before the Board by citizens were summarily dismissed, or ignored. Statements that Board meetings were open to the public are no substitute for not publishing their agendas, the project schedules, or actively reaching out to make the townspeople aware of their overall plans. As a result of the manner in which the BOT pushed this project through the approval process, few but those close to the BOT became familiar with the project before they saw it being built!

As a result of poor communication, the manner in which the Trustees terminated the former Librarian, and other reasons, approximately 25 percent (1/4) of Ashby's voting population signed a recall petition for the five eligible members of the BOT. Many other voters declined to sign the petitions for fear of political and/or economic reprisals. The Trustees expended much time and Town funds to disqualify enough voter signatures, that two of these five Trustees managed to avoid the recall election.

The claim that the library expansion project did not require the use of tax money, is false. The \$1.4M state matching grant used for construction came from Massachusetts Income Taxes; the \$800,000 Community Development Block Grant came from Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development which gets its money from Federal Income Taxes; and over \$400,000 came from local property taxes. This local funding could have paid for the fire truck that was purchased, instead of having to pass a Proposition 2-1/2 over ride. The size of the addition now requires not only a \$10,000+ increase in annual operating expenses, utilities etc., but an additional \$11,000 Library Assistant position (more property taxes). The budget for the library has risen from \$28,000 last year ('05-'06) to roughly \$49,000 this year ('06-'07), a \$21,000, or 75 percent increase!

The current political and social climate surrounding their library expansion project is a direct result of the trustees' own actions. The situation is such that there are many rumors circulating around town that warrant examination. This again is illustrative of the BOT's failure to accurately communicate

the condition of the expansion project to the townspeople of Ashby. A few of these rumors, to which we would like to know the answers, are as follows:

Did the BOT ignore input from concerned and interested citizens during the planning and design phases of the project? Have the BOT hosted invitation only private parties at town expense? Can the BOT hold fund raising events on town property? Did the BOT spend approximately \$3 million for a project that had a projected occupancy of 60 patrons per day when the condition of the present public water supply only permits 24 patrons per day? If there was a move to fire the former director and librarian in 2000, why was the decision executed in 2006 just prior to the opening of the expansion? Did the BOT disclose fully the political climate, including the recall, to the newly hired director?

We want to know the answers to these and other questions, and hope you do to. The BOT must improve its communication with the townspeople of Ashby, and any and all remaining issues must be addressed in an open and transparent manner.

We hope that the people of the Town of Ashby will elect us to the Ashby Free Public Library Board of Trustees on Tuesday, Dec. 19, so that we can be catalysts for change on the Board and lead Ashby's Library to an open, healthy, and secure future.

Annette Acosta
Barbara Connor Despres
John A. Steffian, Jr.
Ashby
Candidates for Library Trustees

Winter coat drive a success

To the Editor:

I am writing express to all those who participated in Kay's Dairy Bar Coat Drive Program in Westminster. My most sincere appreciation, you certainly should be commended for talking the time and effort to come out on such a poor day (weather wise). Nearly 300 warm winter coats were collected for distribution by Friendly House, a neighborhood/settlement house, located in Worcester. Your generosity helped us insure that many of our neediest people from central Massachusetts would not face the winter without a warm coat.

A word of special thanks goes to Mr. Daniel Saad for donating the three hundred meals, each of which were exchanged for a winter jacket. A special thank you must go as well to the following staff who so graciously donated their time:

The Clam Box Crew: Shauna Woodard, Christina Lopez, Renee Rhoads, Nicole Saad, Jessica Gameau, Kelly Hanrahan; Nicole Smith, Chelsea Morin, Nikkie Marty, Mindy Lafontaine, Tenielle Saad, David Reardon, Tony Lopez, Daniel Lopez, Justin Walker; Alex Drane, Brian Egan, Nathan Brown, Nate Saad, Zack Saad, Darryl Saad and Jimmy Bliss.

Once again on behalf of the members of our Board of Directors, our staff and all those who have and will benefit from your kindness, my most heartfelt thank you.

Best wishes to all for a happy and healthy holiday season and a prosperous New Year.

Gordon P. Hargrove
Friendly House, Inc.
Executive Director
Worcester

JOURNAL POLL QUESTION

When should a recall election be held?

- ~ When voters are not pleased with the actions of the elected officials.
- ~ Only when an elected official has committed an illegal or unethical action.
- ~ Never.

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