

BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
HINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

Response to Hingham Town Government Study Committee

November 8, 2010

1. Please state your committee's charge or job description.

The Hingham Public Library (the "Library Corporation") was incorporated in 1872 by Special Act of the Massachusetts Legislature. The powers and duties of the Board of Trustees of the Library Corporation are specifically set forth in two later Special Acts, the first approved in 1963 and the second in 1965. The 1963 Special Act, after stating that all of the property of the Library Corporation should be held by it in trust "for the purpose of operating and maintaining a library in the town of Hingham to be known as the Hingham Public Library for the benefit of the inhabitants of the town of Hingham", further provides that (a) the Trustees are "public officers for the proper execution of the [above] trust"; and (b) the affairs of the Library Corporation shall be managed as provided in its by-laws. The 1965 Special Act provides that the "entire control and management" of the Library Corporation and all of its powers shall be vested in the Board of Trustees.

The by-laws of the Library Corporation state that its Board of Trustees "shall have the entire control and management of the corporation, its property and business and of the carrying out of all or any of its purposes and may exercise all of its powers."

2. To whom is your committee accountable?

Each Trustee is a public officer for the proper execution of the trust created by the 1963 Special Act and, as such, each Trustee is accountable as a fiduciary to the beneficiaries of that trust; namely, the inhabitants of the Town of Hingham.

3. What three things contribute most to the successful functioning of your committee?

(i) The Director of the Library participates in the functioning of the full Board of Trustees and of its several committees, subcommittees and task forces. His involvement, which is essential, takes many forms, including obtaining and furnishing information to the Trustees, planning for, attending and participating in regular and special meetings of the Trustees and providing to the Trustees a well-informed and reliable source of expertise and knowledge of matters affecting the Library.

(ii) Trustees are willing to give freely of the time necessary to prepare for and attend meetings, to actively participate in the discussions and deliberations at meetings and to accept responsibility for and to carry out tasks with diligence and on a timely basis. Also, as lay men and women with a wide range of interests and activities, they are an essential channel of communication between the professional staff and the community of library users.

(iii) Trustees are willing, on an on-going basis, to act in the community as an essential channel of communication and as advocates for the Library.

4. What three things would you change to bring about more effective functioning?

Three suggested changes that are worthy of consideration are:

(i) employment by the Town, or by the Library Corporation, of a development officer, i.e., professional fund-raiser, for the Library;

(ii) amendment of the charter documents of the Library Corporation (Special Acts and by-laws) to effect such changes as may be recommended by a study to be conducted by the Board of Trustees; and

(iii) development of protocols for the active involvement of our Board in the filling of Trustee vacancies on our Board, with the view to selecting and recruiting new Trustees who will provide needed expertise and experience and who will reflect the demographic make-up of the adult population of the Town.

5. What challenges do you anticipate that might impact the work of your committee in the future and what changes would you suggest for addressing those challenges?

(i) It is almost certain that serious financial challenges will be felt by the Library (and all Town departments) for several years. See response 4(i) for a suggested change to address those challenges.

(ii) Given the age of the Trustees currently in office, it is likely that there will be an unusually large number of vacancies in the future. See response 4(iii) for a suggested change to address this challenge.

(iii) The historic role of libraries as places to hold printed books and other physical library materials most likely will continue to diminish. However, a unique and more important role is that of a library as a free and open community center for people, ideas and culture, and to maintain that role our Library will need to continue to provide access to reliable and well-supported technology for the purposes of communication, entertainment, research and information. This challenge is addressed in the (soon to be adopted) 2011-2015 Long Range Plan of the Hingham Public Library

6. Do you have anything to add?

Although we have nothing to add at this time, should there be a change we will furnish you with a supplement to this response at that time. Also, you should feel free to contact C. B. Abbott, President of the Library Corporation (home tel : 781-749-1823, [cbabbo@comcast.net](mailto:cbabbo@comcast.net)) if you wish any further information from the Board of Trustees in connection with your work