

**Board of Trustees
of the
Needham Free Public Library**

December 13, 2023

Marianne B. Cooley, Chair
Kevin Keane, Vice-Chair
Heidi Frail, Clerk
Marcus A. Nelson
Cathy Dowd
Needham Select Board
Needham Town Hall
1471 Highland Avenue
Needham, Massachusetts 02492

Re: Library Board of Trustees Support for Fiscal Year 2025 Spending Request

Dear Members of the Needham Select Board:

We, the Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library, submit this letter to provide you with a brief update on the Library's recent activities and to urge you to support the Library's operating and capital budget requests for the 2025 fiscal year. We greatly appreciate your strong support for the Library in the past, and we offer these comments to provide additional context for some of the Library's current requests.

The Library is one of our Town's most important and treasured assets, representing our Town's values. It also creates value. Along with our schools, parks and other essential town resources, the Library is foundational to ensuring that Needham is the kind of town people want to live in. And the people of Needham appreciate all that the Library offers, as reflected in the extremely high 96% rating for Library services reported in Needham's 2022 National Community Survey.

The Spending Request reports in detail the accomplishments of the Library over the past fiscal year: approximately 240,000 patron visits, more than 550,000 materials circulated, substantial increases in program attendance, a new "Library of Things," and many more. The Library also recently completed a 2023-2027 Strategic Plan that followed a thoughtful process over several months with contributions from Library staff, Trustees, Town representatives, Library patrons, and the public via focus groups and surveys. This Strategic Plan provides a framework to guide the Library as it strives to fulfill its public service mission.

The Library is currently in the process of hiring a new Director to lead the team. At this time of transition, the Trustees very much appreciate the outstanding efforts of Library staff and the Town Manager's Office for their stewardship and dedication to ensure that Library operations continue to run smoothly. We defer to Deputy Town Manager Katie King and Acting Library

Director Demetri Kyriakis to answer any questions you may have about the Library's budget requests, which we believe are reasonable and reflect appropriate consideration of the Library's needs.

The Trustees strongly advocate in support of the Capital Funding Request for the re-design of the young adult area in the Library. Funding for a Library Space Utilization Study (the "Space Study") was approved at Needham's 2022 Annual Town Meeting with the support of both the Select Board and Finance Committee. The Town engaged the Boston architectural firm Utile, working in collaboration with Needham's Permanent Public Building Committee, to undertake the Space Study and help us develop a plan for updating the Library to meet our Town's changing needs since the major renovation in 2006. This impressive Space Study, informed by stakeholders and community input, identified several priorities for improvement.

One of the options that Utile proposed for consideration was a comprehensive re-organization of the Library that would have involved, among other things, moving the children's area to a different location. Representatives of the Library and Town concluded that the potential expense for such work was more than the Town could afford at this time. Instead, we are persuaded that a better approach is to renovate the Library incrementally by addressing in succession the main priorities identified in the Space Study in a way that allows us to start making improvements as soon as possible while spreading out the work and costs over a number of years. The four areas of priority are, in order: the young adult section; the children's room; the Rosemary Street entrance and creation of a new multipurpose room; and the Highland Street entrance and staff areas.

The first priority is to create a new dedicated young adult area on the second floor to improve the space for the significant number of teens who use the Library on school day afternoons (sometimes more than 60 – a nice sight to see!), and also improve the experience for other Library users who would appreciate a quieter experience during those times. We are excited about the prospect of improving the Library by addressing this priority as the first step in a multi-part plan that responds to the conclusions reached in the Space Study. We urge you to include this capital request as a warrant article to be considered at the Spring 2024 Town Meeting.

We know you share our understanding of the Library's immense value to the community. Some of you may have joined us and more than 400 of our neighbors in Powers Hall this past May when the Library was the focus of a special event featuring renowned Presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin. We were honored when Dr. Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress, provided us with a personal video to honor the occasion. Dr. Hayden observed: "A library's role in our communities is even more relevant and important than ever. Libraries are the pillar or cornerstone of democracy because we provide free and open access to information and also a place for civic engagement and dialogue that serve as bedrocks for civil society." With this in

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mind, we hope the Select Board will favorably consider the Library's Spending Request for the 2025 fiscal year.

As always, many thanks for the important work you do for our Town and for your careful consideration of the Library's budget requests.

Very truly yours,

Board of Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library



Jay Fialkov, Chair

Robert A. Petitt, Vice-Chair

Meghan Small, Secretary

Anna Giraldo-Kerr

Kay Cahill

Erhardt Graeff

Michael O'Neal

cc: Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager
Katie King, Deputy Town Manager
David Davison, Deputy Town Manager/Director of Finance
Members of the Town of Needham Finance Committee
Demetri Kyriakis, Acting Library Director