

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

April 9, 2025

Town Meeting Members
Needham Select Board
Needham Town Hall
1471 Highland Avenue
Needham, Massachusetts 02492

Re: Needham Free Public Library – Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget and Capital Spending

Dear Town Meeting Members and Members of the Needham Select Board,

We, the Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library, seek your support for our 2026 Operating Budget. We also ask approval of Article 29, our Capital Improvement request to renovate and expand the Library's second floor teen space. We hope to better accommodate the many teenagers who gather at the Library after school and to better serve other patrons seeking a quieter experience. Thank you for your strong support for the Library over the years.

While the Library serves Needham residents of every age, income, and background, its operating budget consumes only one percent of Needham's General Fund. In fiscal year 2024, the Library reported 286,538 patron visits, 557,056 materials circulated, and an 18% increase in program attendance over fiscal year 2023. The Library continues to follow its 2023–2027 Strategic Plan, guided by the input of the Town, and review its progress via our annual Action Plan developed and reviewed in partnership between the Trustees and Library Director Rob MacLean.

We defer to Deputy Town Manager Katie King and Library Director Rob MacLean to answer any questions you may have about the Library's budget, which we believe is reasonable and considerate of the Library's needs.

We particularly seek your support for Article 29, the important Capital Funding Request of \$2,386,000 for renovation of the young adult/teen area in the Library. As you know, public libraries are in a time of great transition as they evolve from their traditional role housing books and information to a broader community hub of activity, culture, arts, and information. It has been more than 20 years since the Library was renovated and expanded. Much has changed in that time. As information has gone digital, people now flock to the Library for in-person activities, programs, and cultural events.

With this in mind, we worked with architectural firm Utile and Needham's Permanent Public Building Committee to conduct a space study of the library. We sought public

input through surveys and focus groups. Although Utile initially proposed a comprehensive, top-to-bottom re-organization of the Library, representatives of the Library and Town determined that the potential expense of a single, large project was unrealistic considering Needham's other financial priorities. Instead, we developed a fiscally conservative plan to reorganize and renovate interior spaces in four-phases in order of priority.

Our first priority is to create a larger dedicated teen area on the second floor to improve the space for the sometimes 100 or more teens who use the Library on school day afternoons. In so doing, we will improve the experience for adult and other Library users who appreciate a quieter experience during those times. We are grateful to the Town for funding the redesign work this past year.

We are very excited by the excellent design Utile and the PPBC have proposed. The Library staff and Trustees have been preparing for construction and paying careful attention to the cost estimate. Most recently, we changed the proposed emergency lighting design to reduce the cost by ~\$20,000. We urge you to support the construction cost Warrant Article during the Spring 2025 Town Meeting.

Thank you for the invaluable work you do for our Town and for your careful consideration of the Library's budget requests.

Sincerely,

Board of Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library

/s/ Robert A. Petitt

Robert A. Petitt, Chair
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