

THE BEDFORD CITIZEN

Elizabeth McCulloch Hacala – Candidate for Library Trustee

Caucus Nominee



Events:

No events scheduled

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Candidate Q&A - February 18, 2016

What major challenges do you expect to face during the next three years?

Firstly, library funding continues to be under pressure at the state and federal level. We have a tradition of valuing library funding in Bedford, but sadly that is not a universal experience. The monies we receive from the state and federal governments are critical to continuing the high caliber library services value in town and in Massachusetts. For example, only one tenth of one percent of the state budget goes to fund libraries and library services. At the federal level Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds are awarded to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners who in turn make grants to libraries across the Commonwealth. Without these two sources of funding library programs would disappear or would put further pressure on the local funding. The ripple effect would affect communities across the Commonwealth, including Bedford. As a Trustee I would advocate for secure and strengthened library funding from all levels of government.

Secondly, in this era of the Internet, some are under the misapprehension that libraries are obsolete or fading. Although the Internet has had a profound effect on libraries, they are in no way disappearing. Libraries are critical gateways that bring the Internet to those who do not have it, teach Internet skills to those who need them, and provide information literacy help to those already online. Even a job at Target or a similar store often requires applicants to complete an online application. The Internet is no longer a luxury, it has now become

integral to participating in our economy and communities. Beyond the books, databases, movies and more, the library also exists as a critical community hub.

The presence of the Internet has not displaced the core role libraries play. They are still vibrant and active. The Bedford Free Public Library has an average of 3,885 weekly visits throughout the year and held 371 programs for children and teens. These programs are a critical way for members of our town to meet one another and maintain our strong community. The library is also a safe after-school destination for kids to do homework, and is even sometimes a refuge from bullies. As a trustee I would promote all the ways the Bedford Free Public Library provides critical services to our town and community.

Finally, technology will continue to be a challenge for libraries. As more resources become digital we will need to continue evaluating how to best provide it to our patrons. A big area of challenge is e-books. The current pricing models for many electronic resources, including e-books, put libraries at a significant disadvantage. As a Trustee I would work with the library leadership to evaluate and address the challenges technology introduces.

What innovative metrics might capture the less tangible qualities that make the Library vital to the life of our town?

We are fortunate to have a healthy and vibrant library. As stated previously, The Bedford Free Public Library holds over 350 programs for children and teens per year and an average of 3,885 weekly visits each week. That is more than four times the number visitors to our library, per capita, than the statewide median.

Those are pretty easy measurements to make yet, as the question suggests, there are many less tangible ways the library affects our community. The challenging thing about trying to capture intangible qualities is, that by their very nature, they are elusive and resist quantifying. Simply measuring “something” is not enough. We must ensure that metrics we create capture the meaningful data, not simply data.

With that in mind, one program we could implement would be a feedback box. A place where patrons of all ages could draw a picture or write a quick note describing how the library benefits them and its impact on the larger community. Rather than a passive container, the feedback box would need to be part of a community outreach program to truly help us understand the library's impact.

If there is a resource or a database we cannot quantify, we could work with vendors to add in

reporting tools as a condition of upgrading or new purchases.

A group of community stakeholders could also be surveyed periodically to ask them about the library's role and contribution to the wider community. There is a lot of research that says the best way to measure something intangible, is to simply have a group of experts discuss it until they reach a consensus. Their intuitive and detailed understanding is more effective than any model.

No matter what we might implement, we must make sure we are measuring the right things, that the effort put in is worth the data coming out, and that it does not interfere with the work of our already excellent library. Bedford Free Public Library has a regional reputation as an outstanding and friendly library. We already know people travel from surrounding communities to Bedford specifically because of our library. In the end, that may be the only metric we need.

2016 Citizen's Caucus Statement

I would like to thank Doris Smith for nominating me as a candidate for the Board of Library Trustees at the January Caucus. I am very excited to be a candidate for this board and hope to have the opportunity to serve as a Trustee.

I grew up in Bedford, and in many ways, grew up at the Bedford Free Public Library. It was a place to find information, be greeted by a friendly face and get access to information. In the important ways, it is still that same place today. The library is bigger, the card catalogs were replaced by computer terminals, and there are now online databases and e-books, yet it is still a place to get access to information and help when needed.

I began my career as a software engineer first at Lotus Development and later on the west coast at Hewlett Packard. When my husband and I were looking to relocate to Massachusetts I had three criteria: good schools, a good library, and open town meeting. We have now been here for nearly 19 years, and during that time I have had the opportunity to serve the community as a founding member of Community Preservation Committee, chairing that committee, as President of the Bedford Arts and Crafts Society, and as an occasional reporter for the Bedford Citizen.

During that time I also shifted from a career in software, to work in non-profits, working for nearly a decade with the Massachusetts Library Association. My time with MLA gave me an opportunity to become familiar with the modern challenges of libraries at the state, local and federal level.

In this era of the Internet and connectivity, libraries are more critical than ever. The sheer volume of information available requires trained professionals to help sift through the noise. Whether we are adopting a new puppy, welcoming a new baby, buying a house, starting a business, or attempting to understand a new diagnosis, many of our major life journeys begin with a visit to the library and the guidance of a librarian therein.

I now look to take my combined experience in technology, committee/town service, and libraries and direct it to supporting the Bedford Free Public Library as a trustee. Bedford Free Public Library has had a long history of providing excellent service to the town. Likewise, the library has been at the forefront of changing technology, from circulating portable computers, to providing early public access to computers, to most recently circulating mobile internet hot spots.

I thank you for your time and consideration as a candidate and ask for your vote at the Town Election in March.

[Click to read Elizabeth McC. Hacala's candidate statement in The Bedford Citizen](#)