

## **Sharon Historical Society Interim Board Meeting, May 6, 2021 - Minutes**

The Board met remotely by Zoom on May 6, 2021.

Present: Brad Larson (president), Don Williams (vice president), Elisabeth McGregor (secretary), Carolyn Weeks (treasurer), Doug Southard (archivist), Maria Anderson, Debbie DeBassio, Jimmie Keating, Paul Lauenstein, Mare Parker-O'Toole, Jan Parr, Shirley Schofield, Kristin Slater, Meg Winikates

**President's Report:** Brad Larson called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM, with assurances that the Board is working well together and encouragement to keep up that effort as we tackle the difficult issue of how to handle the Society's annual meeting and elections. He reported that Marie Cuneo could not make the meeting but favored postponement.

**Minutes:** It was moved, seconded and unanimously voted to approve the report of the May 25 quarterly member meeting and the minutes of the April 1 Board meeting and April 21 executive session.

**Treasurer's Report:** Carolyn reviewed and made minor updates to her previously submitted monthly figures showing income of \$795.53 and disbursements of \$886.55 for an ending operating balance of \$6671.85 and an overall funds balance of \$31,376.81.

Shirley asked about how donated funds were being tracked and looked after. Beth expressed concern about the Society's financial stability and the need to raise funds to offset some of the loss. A brief discussion was tabled due to the need to move on.

**Nominating Committee Report:** Maria reported that the Nominating Committee had worked extensively on whether and if so how to conduct a mail-in election and hold a remote Annual Meeting in June. The Committee recommended by a 3-2 vote to delay the Annual Meeting and election until the fall when we could meet in person. Maria, Beth and Carolyn presented the majority report in favor of delay and Paul and Don the minority report in favor of proceeding with mail-in voting. Extensive discussion followed, with Paul, Beth, Don, Meg, Mare, Jan, Debby and Kristen asking questions and offering opinions. Among the issues:

Whether it was more important to follow the bylaws which call for elections at an annual meeting, which can be scheduled at the Board's discretion, or more important to follow the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding, which called for the interim board to prepare for elections in June.

Security and acceptance of a mail-in and email vote never held before, and potential challenges to its validity.

The need and desire to resolve uncertainty, move on and get a duly elected Board in place as soon as possible, since according to the MOU the interim board should be acting in a custodial capacity and not launching any major initiatives or changes.

The desire to maintain a balanced board, and how best to achieve that. Concern expressed by Beth that a review of the member information and nominating forms suggested a substantial organized bloc of identical nominations and committee suggestions strongly favoring one side, and fear that remote and inactive members who would not normally vote could be organized for that purpose. Don noted a possible smaller cluster on the other side. Countered by Paul that more votes than usually possible would be more democratic, and by Jan that Brad's presence helped keep the balance and that people will vote as they choose to.

Brad agreed that maintaining a balanced board is ideal, stating that we need to keep reaching out and building trust, and that we should strongly encourage re-election of the interim slate.

Concerns about the accuracy of the member database and mailing labels. (Database discussion continued later in the meeting.)

Concerns about possible repercussions and suspicions of interim board for delaying the vote.

Logistical issues around apparently slow and incomplete delivery of the newsletter in time for people to return their ballots, and how to track and accommodate people who wanted to vote at the meeting.

Brad asked whether the Board was ready to vote to postpone or to look at the ballot. Jimmie suggested and others agreed that we should look at the ballot, which the Nominating Committee had spent many hours working on. Paul presented and explained the ballot and took a few additional suggestions for the committee to do some further tweaking.

At this point we took an intermission from the topic.

**Potential grant funding possibilities:** Meg reviewed the spreadsheet she had compiled of grant funding we might qualify for, noting that most funding support was directed at institutions trying to sustain a paid staff. Mass Humanities offers Covid-related 'Bridge Street Grants' of up to \$500 each to present free online programs. Meg presented some program possibilities, including how to create a family time capsule and how to do oral history interviews of family and friends. There is also funding for community reading and discussion of Frederick Douglass's famous speech "What to the American slave is the Fourth of July?", which might find partnership and support from other town groups like the Pluralism Network. The Board by consensus authorized Meg to work on applications for all three Mass Humanities grant options; Beth, Paul, Carolyn and Don offered assistance.

Meg also noted that there may also be capacity building grants to support things like digitization of collections. MSHRAB also offers veterans' heritage grants, which members expressed interest in exploring, but the deadline for this year has passed.

**Sharon Street Art Festival May 15-23:** Meg presented the art group's plans, shared by Hana Jenner. They would like our approval to place some art (small 'fairy houses') on the Society's

front lawn and open the driveway and parking lot for children to do chalk art. The Board offered tentative approval but wanted further clarification.

**Internet service:** Don reported from Communications Committee. The present non-Comcast router no longer works; he and Kevin made plans with Comcast to restore internet service to the museum but eliminate TV from the package for a savings of about \$50/month after an initial installation fee for new router. Kristin asked if we were renting the router or would own it which is often cheaper; Don recommended working through Comcast. It was moved, seconded and voted to authorize the Communications Committee to carry out its plan and pay for the installation.

**Database issues:** We are using an old MS Access database that is flawed and problematic but contains important information. Doug and Kristen offered to try to help import its contents into Excel where they could be reviewed by board members. It was agreed we need to explore a better, more easily shared data storage and retrieval system, perhaps cloud-based.

**Return to Discussion on Annual Meeting and Elections:** Issues examined included when in June we could be ready to carry out the meeting and election, and whether we needed to further amend the ballot to recommend election of the interim board slate. On the question of whether to proceed with the election, the straw vote was 7 in favor of proceeding with the mail/email ballot and June Annual Meeting (Don, Jan, Shirley, Paul, Debbie, Jimmie, Doug) and 6 in favor of delaying the Annual Meeting and vote until the fall when it could be held in person (Maria, Kristin, Beth, Carolyn, Mare, Meg). Shirley felt that since Marie was not at the meeting and didn't hear the discussion we should not count her position for delay. It was decided to proceed with the June Annual Meeting and refer the election procedures back to the Nominating Committee to work out. Maria asked everyone to get their candidate bio statements to her right away. Brad said that we were trying 'democracy on training wheels' and stressed the importance of encouraging all those who were interested in serving on the board and weren't elected to stay engaged in Society activities in other meaningful ways. Don expressed special appreciation of Maria, Paul of Beth, Beth of Don, and Maria of the whole Nominating Committee for their hard work and collaborative spirit.

With a tight timeline ahead, it was decided to take up unfinished business at a special follow-up meeting on Tuesday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, with the next regular Board meeting scheduled for June 3<sup>rd</sup>. The meeting was adjourned at 8:47 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Elisabeth McGregor, Secretary