

Community support is needed for the library! Here are some ways the Friends (and others) can help.

Two points to talk about with friends and neighbors:

Vote “YES” on the warrant article (on the town ballot on Tuesday, March 10th) that establishes a library repair fund of \$25,000 a year. Currently all repairs are funded out of the general library budget. Any money not spent during a calendar year rolls back to the town. This makes it hard to fund repairs that pop up over the course of the year, especially at the end of the year or the beginning of the year. If the library “holds back” money for emergency expenses that pop up in November or December and nothing breaks, then the library loses that money. It cannot be brought forward to the next year’s bills. The town releases the money to the library budget in 3 or 6 month increments, so if the library has a large unanticipated expense in January or February then the money to pay for that needs to come out of other expenses, like buying fewer books and supplies. The proposed fund would put \$25,000 a year into an account that would roll over. Some years the library might use it all, but if not then the remainder would be added to the following year’s \$25,000. This issue relates to the info in the next paragraph.

Increase awareness that many of the library’s systems are aging and will soon be in need of repair. This will surprise many Exeter residents, because the perception is that we got a whole new library just a few years ago. But that’s not what really happened. Originally a warrant article was proposed to renovate the whole library, expand it as needed and do some other improvements, including a walk along the river. This did not pass. The plans were revised and a few years later a much less expensive warrant article was proposed that focused on fixing systems that were failing or likely to fail soon and expanding the building. The river walk was eliminated. This warrant article passed. So while the library LOOKS new, quite a bit of it is 40 years old and the old parts are beginning to fail. So far all expenses are covered, but as time goes on the bills may mount to more than what can be covered by the fund proposed on the ballot this year (see above) PLUS the Friends’ money. It is good for people to be reminded of this from time to time in case something major fails (like the fire suppression system, which is critical and is looking weak) and the library needs to come to the community for money or start a major fundraising campaign.

One issue to contact your state rep about:

A bill (HB 1214) has been proposed and is headed to the legislature’s House Municipal and County Governance Committee. The bill would allow Exeter (and other NH municipalities, of course) to do away with independent library boards of trustees and have the library be governed by the select board instead. This issue has problems that are both practical (the selectmen already have a lot to do, and they will not be able to devote the time to the library that the library board of trustees does) and political (the bill sponsors are the same ones who feel that libraries are too liberal/woke and have said that will be improved by moving the library under the “control” of the select board). One of Exeter’s reps, Julie Gilman, is on the committee reviewing the bill. Her email is Julie.Gilman@gc.nh.gov. Having a bunch of letters from Exeter residents who want the library to have an independent board of trustees would help her when the bill comes up for discussion in committee. The next page has a sample letter. The website of the NH Library Trustees Association (<https://nhlta.org/>) has more info, including a list of the other reps on the committee (<https://nhlta.org/wp-content/uploads/hb-1214-sponsors-contact-info1.pdf>) and some helpful talking points to put in your letter (<https://nhlta.org/wp-content/uploads/hb-1214-talking-points.pdf>). Using these tools writing an email should take only a few minutes and could really help the library!

To Julie.Gilman@gc.nh.gov (and/or additional reps)

Dear Representative Gilman,

I respectfully ask that you DO NOT support HB 1214 as you work with your fellow members of the House Municipal and County Governance Committee. This bill allows municipalities to assume governance of their public libraries, which I believe is not in the best interest of the citizens of Exeter.

New Hampshire has a long tradition of independent libraries that provide the public with free access to a wide variety of materials and programs. Providing these services is a complex process that requires attention to community needs and lean budgets. This process is managed by the library staff and overseen by a board of trustees that is independent from the town board of selectmen. The benefits of having an independent library board of trustees are many, including:

- Library trustees have a vested interest in the mission of town libraries to promote literacy, provide information on resources and serve as town community centers.
- Library trustees receive education on the specific laws governing libraries and obligate themselves to uphold them.
- Library trustees focus solely on the library, devoting hours of work each month to supporting the library staff.

I have lived in Exeter since _____. I visit the Exeter Public Library regularly and participate in many of its programs. The library works hard to serve our residents and is a source of energy and pride in our community. The library staff is able to fulfill its mission because it is supported by an independent board of trustees. Our selectmen are hardworking and capable, but they have many responsibilities and cannot be expected to devote time and energy to understanding the day to day needs of the library's patrons. Passing HB 1214 and moving library governance to the select board would result in a weaker library that is less able to provide excellent service to our community.

Thank you for your service to our town and state.

Sincerely,

(Name)