

Ashland Library Advisory Panel

Meeting Agenda

August 7, 2025

1. Call meeting to order
2. Review and approve July 31 Minutes
3. New Business: Course of Action #1
 - a. Background
 - b. Pros/Cons/Issues/Implications for the future (financial, operations, etc)
4. Creation of a survey tool for other libraries
5. Review document from Maine State library, select potential survey recipients
6. Other Business
7. Adjournment

Ashland Library Advisory Panel Meeting Two—August 7, 2025

Work Week 2 for the Library Advisory Panel began by reading and approving the minutes from the previous session and reviewing a written synopsis of a telephone conversation with an experienced professional librarian formerly employed at the University of Maine at Presque Isle. Discussion that followed included a somewhat spotty history of the relationship between the Gladys J. Craig Memorial Library and the Town of Ashland over the past decade. The public record includes interesting snippets of information but a somewhat intermittent record of actions. For example, there are no recorded numbers related to the subsidies submitted by the surrounding communities to help support the Ashland Library during the mid-teens. In 2020, a 3% budgetary increase to allow for inflation was implemented for all communities utilizing library services. This was also the year that the library board of trustees disbanded and regulation of the Ashland library was returned to the town council; the reason and procedure was not recorded.

Information in this decade is better documented, both in terms of minutes from town council meetings and from information in the Public Library Annual Report (PLAR) published by the Maine State Library System. A synopsis of budgetary transitions between Fiscal Year 2020 through 2024 indicates that the Ashland municipal appropriation to the library rose from \$47,677 (91% of the overall budget) to \$62,001 (61.6%) in four years. The subsidies from the participating surrounding towns rose from 9% of the overall budget to 38% in the same period of time; this distribution includes 18.7% from Portage, 10.5% from Masardis, 4.1% from Garfield, 1.3% from Nashville, and 3.4% from Oxbow. The Maine PLAR reported FY2024 local revenue for the library equaled \$100,584 serving 1,947 cardholders. For comparison, values for municipal appropriation to Maine libraries in 2024 averaged \$103,057; per capita cost for the hosting town equaled \$2,575, serving 1550 resident card holders and 202 nonresidents. One panel member expressed concerns about the process by which the annual library reports were generated; specifically, how membership records are kept up to date in terms of deaths or members moving out of the region.

The annual budget for the Ashland Library 2025 equals \$113,240.00 and includes subsidies from participating towns; not all the towns have agreed to the

monetary values included in the budget and have voted for lower annual contributions. A discounted subsidy model may be considered for the 2026 fiscal year. Reduced payments will result in a 2026 deficiency of \$26,613 if not resolved by changes to the current budget by the library or by the town as a whole.

Members of the panel discussed the need to include input from other towns regarding operation of the library and subsidy requests going forward. For example, community members may not be aware of the budgetary transition from valuation to per capita calculation which was reflected in the altered subsidies. In the same period, the librarian's position was adjusted to be recognized as a full-time municipal employee eligible for benefits with the weekly salary based on 27 hours when the library is open to the public and 5 hours for planning, grant writing, and other administrative responsibilities. Projects like the recently completed Handicapped Access ramp were grant funded and not part of regular library funding. All panelists agreed that it was unfortunate and inappropriate for school aged children to be banned from the library and disallowed participation in library activities, particularly when M.S.A.D. #32 includes library skills and visits to our library in its curriculum. The consensus of the panel is that Course of Action #1 Current Subsidy Model is not working and at the very least will require revisions.

The remainder of Meeting Two involved gaining input from all panel members regarding development of a survey of other regional libraries using alternative funding models. These include 5 Aroostook County libraries using municipal control with an advisory board and 5 structured as IRS nonprofit 501c3 status entities. Ashland is the only town using municipal subsidy model with no advisory board and there were no local libraries identified by the PLAR as privately funded/operated institutions. From the pool of questions generated by the panel, a draft survey will be discussed and approved in Work Week Three. The survey will be sent to the identified libraries to gain insight into alternative funding models. Two panel members agreed to contact librarians at each institution by phone to encourage timely participation.

Recorder,
Anne Chase