



PADMA CHOUDRY
LIBRARY TRUSTEE

Caucus Nominee: Yes

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

My name is Padma Choudry, and it would be an honor to represent you on Bedford's Board of Library Trustees. In addition to being a lifelong reader and library patron, I'm also an attorney, and a wife and mother of two young kids in the Bedford Public School system. While my family is relatively new to town and represents the changing face of Bedford, we have been active users of the library in the time that we've been here.

We moved to Bedford in the middle of the lockdown, so curbside pickup was a lifesaver for me and my kids. One of the first ways I was able to "meet" people in the community was through the BFC's virtual Book Club. My kids have enjoyed the library's craft kits, activity pages, and the virtual programming. We also have been loving the Friends' sales and the cart outside, and I have recently started volunteering (schedules permitting). My family has been lucky to visit since the reopening, so my kids got to meet Murphy and got some ideas from the book recommendation lists, and we are so thankful for all the hard work and thought that the library staff, the trustees and the town have put in to making these resources both available and safe to our family and the community.

Before deciding to run, I had the pleasure of speaking to current Library Trustee, Elizabeth Hacala. I also recently attended the January meeting of the Board of Library Trustees and the Library's budget presentation to the Finance Committee to learn more about the work and the process. From those discussions and my patronage of the library, I already see so much good work and great ideas coming from this library, so part of why I am running is simply to be an active participant in these conversations and decisions. Another part of it is because I can bring a new perspective to the Board, as well as additional ideas worth exploring – from new items for the Library of Things, to some suggestions for donated books, to increasing community engagement from various demographics. I'm sure the broader community has some other needs and ideas too, and I would love to hear them.

Thank you for taking the time to read, and I hope you come out to vote on March 12th.

REPLIES TO THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS QUESTIONS

Q1—Will you maintain the anti-censorship policy of our current board? If not, why not?

I support the current board's anti-censorship policy. I believe most people would be surprised to hear the names of some of the formative books of our childhoods that have been challenged: *The Great Gatsby*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*, *The Color Purple*, *The Lord of the Flies*, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, *Beloved*, and *In Cold Blood*.

It's important that people are exposed to different opinions and ideas and are able to make up their own minds, while also understanding that others may hear the same facts and reach different (but valid) conclusions. As a whole and individually, people are messy and flawed and think differently from each other. Books and art should represent, explore and celebrate those perspectives. It's important for our kids to see and know that.

Q2—Are there changes in current services or new services you would propose to meet the needs of underserved parts of our community?

I am grateful to our library for working hard to safely facilitate checkouts and service our community during the pandemic, when several other libraries were unable to. Being relatively new to the community, I am just getting familiar with some of the different services the library provides, such as serving as one of the pickup locations for Covid-19 test kits and free printing. Partnering with community organizations is the best way to understand and address the needs of the community. Adding story times (including inclusive options) or homework assistance hours could be helpful. Another idea is for the Friends of the Library to donate some of their donations that cannot be resold to local organizations that could make use of them (e.g., gently worn children's books to shelters). Of course, these – and any ideas – would need additional resources for implementation, and I also have some thoughts on ways to increase community and volunteer engagement.

Q3—Bedford's demographics are changing. Our population is aging and we have an increasing number of residents whose primary language is not English. How can the Library reach out to and better serve these residents

Here, too, I think the Library is doing quite a good job. The Large Print and foreign language book selections are significant – and even better because of the sharing across the Minuteman Library Network. In addition, there are great resources for children in different languages and about different cultures. The Library also offers audiobook and e-book options that provide alternatives for people with accessibility issues. This year, the Library partnered with the Parents Diversity Council for Diwali and Lunar New Year, with craft kits and book stations. My family enjoyed these activities, and I think we should do more partnering events like this (with PDC and other organizations) throughout the year. Other ideas include a senior book buddy programs or bringing back One Book, One Bedford, which I've heard so much about.