

Tower Hill faces ‘devastating’ cut after grant revoked

BOYLSTON – On April 15, New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill (NEBG) was notified that its \$250,000 Museums for America grant awarded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) had been canceled. The grant, issued in 2024 by the independent federal agency, was intended as a 3-year grant allowing the botanic garden to expand essential curatorial practices.

This includes hiring a full-time staff person responsible for inventorying NEBG’s scientifically significant plant collections and making important records available online to a global audience, while also enhancing the visitor experience for those on site.

“The loss of this grant is devastating,” said Grace Elton, CEO of New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill.

The Boylston botanic garden welcomes more than 200,000 visitors each year. It has held AAM Accreditation for over 20 years, indicating that the organization operates at the highest standard of museum best practice. The IMLS funds awarded to the garden were granted after a rigorous application process.

“We will appeal the grant termination and call on our community and our elected officials for support. We are concerned not only for our garden, but for cultural institutions across the state and country that face similar grant terminations. Vital arts and culture programs that provide public education, engage youth in creative ways, protect the environment, and enrich all of our lives are threatened,” Elton said.

NEBG’s grant was part of IMLS’s Museums for America program, a portfolio that in FY24 included grants totaling over \$22 million distributed to more than 100 museums of diverse sizes, disciplines, and geographies. In Massachusetts alone,



Flowers are in bloom at the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill.
Item photo/Jan Gottesman

24 different organizations benefited from nearly \$8.5 million in IMLS funding.

NEBG received little information on next steps moving forward. With the entire staff of IMLS put on leave after a March 14 executive order slashing the agency’s funding, getting answers to questions has been virtually impossible, according to NEBG staff.

The American Alliance of Museums reports that IMLS represents just 0.0046% of the federal budget. In addition to the vast community services museums provide, the museum sector generates more than \$50 billion in economic benefits to the American economy

and supports more than 726,000 jobs.

“It’s extremely frustrating to have this critical funding cut,” Elton said. “We urge our elected officials to defend IMLS and reinstate the legally granted resources that our region’s cherished cultural institutions rely on. We are fortunate to have incredible support in the community, and are grateful to the staff, volunteers, and community members who are working hard to figure out what comes next.”

Neither U.S. Rep. James McGovern (D-Worcester) nor Sen. Elizabeth Warren responded to questions before The Item went to press.

DCR hosting programs in West Boylston April 26

WEST BOYLSTON – The Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Water Supply Protection, is hosting two programs on Saturday, April 26, at its Wachusett Reservoir Headquarters, 180 Beaman St.

A drop-in program, Salt Sleuth Community Science, is happening between 9 a.m. and noon.

Volunteers will contribute valuable data as increasing chloride levels have been documented from road salt in the Wachusett Reservoir Watershed. Collect a water sample from any body of water during Earth Week.

Bring the water sample with you, or pick up a sampling kit at the Wachusett

Reservoir Headquarters. DCR Environmental Quality staff will test for conductivity, map the results, and demonstrate salt measurement techniques.

All ages are welcome. In addition, it is Park Serve Day, also 9 a.m. to noon.

Lend a hand during this day of statewide volunteer service to help with litter and leaf clean-up. Volunteers meet at Wachusett Reservoir Headquarters. Bring a water bottle that can be filled at the headquarters.

Register at bit.ly.3FKesVA.

For more information or to discuss any special accommodations or needs you may have for the day, call (617) 352-4044.

Upcoming plant sales scheduled

Upcoming plant sales, hosted by community groups in the Item communities, include:

Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust Spring Plant Sale, Saturday, May 10, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Sterling Street Brewery. Features vegetables, herbs and pollinator garden plants as well as landscaping plants grown by members. For information, visit clintongreenway.org or (508) 612-1156.

Sterling Garden Club Plant Sale,

Saturday, May 17, 9-11 a.m., Sterling Town Common, featuring perennials, vegetables, herbs, annuals and house plants.

Lancaster Garden Club Plant Sale, Saturday, May 17, 9 a.m.-noon, Lancaster Town Green, perennials, annuals, natives, vegetables, herbs, shrubs and plants for both sun and shade.

Memorial Day Plant Sale, hosted by Boylston Garden Club, Monday, May 26, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., in the town center.

Race to finish your jigsaw puzzle first

CLINTON - The Bigelow Free Public Library will be hosting a Puzzle Race on Wednesday, April 30, at 6 p.m.

With a donation of five of the same 500-piece puzzle from Ravensburger, the library will provide a puzzle to each team (of one to four members) that they will work on together at the library.

The team that finishes the puzzle first wins bragging rights.

Registration is required and can be done at www.bigelowlibrary.org, calling (978) 365-4160, or in person. Hours are Tuesday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

‘May is for Murder’ at Clinton’s Bigelow Library

CLINTON — Bigelow Free Public Library is hosting “May is for Murder: A book and Author Festival,” on Saturday, May 17, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The theme of this event is mystery authors. This event will feature 11 authors. Attendees will have the opportunity to speak with them and learn about their author journeys, their characters and their

book plots.

There will be a Bingo Card challenge; attendees fill in the answers for the opportunity to win free books.

You can register online at www.bigelowlibrary.org or call (978) 365-4160. Visit 54 Walnut St., Tuesday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Insurance

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increase was due to multiple reasons, included the insurance carrier had underrated the town the year before, what he termed “a

strange circumstance,” especially since alternate insurance companies showed similar rates then.

Town Administrator Michael Ward noted the Town Meeting on June 2 this year pushes up the timeline, with the warrant and budget

needing to be set at least a week prior to the meeting, or May 26. That being Memorial Day, posting deadlines under state laws normally go back to the preceding business day, which would be May 23, as listed in the town’s election calendar.

Pride

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calling it a “joyful event.”

Select Board Chair Brian Boyle noted he has gotten feedback on both sides of the issue of a proclamation, including a letter from a resident, included in the Select Board package, requesting “the board refrain from making such a proclamation in 2025 and future years,” adding that “the rules of the Bible are quite clear on the subjects of pride and sexuality.”

In other business

• In its review of fees, which officials have pledged

to do every two years to keep current, the Select Board voted to increase the fees for special permits and variances and applications for administrative appeal. The request came through the Zoning Board.

The ZBA voted to recommending increasing the special permits and variances fee from \$100 to \$150, and the administrative appeal from \$50 to \$150. Town Administrator Maria Sobalvarro noted these application fees had “fallen behind” what is charged by other area towns.

• Zorro, a dog on Kettle Hole Road, was declared a nuisance by the Select

Board, due to several incidents with the same family and dog, which walks on the road; the other dog is on a leash when Zorro has come charging out of its yard.

During the last incident, according to information from the hearing, both dogs were bit.

The owner was required to keep Zorro behind a physical fence while on its property and to be leashed when off the property or not behind a fence.

• The next budget information session is Monday, April 28, 7 p.m., in the Houghton Building, hosted by the moderator.



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