

**04/30/2025**

**Summary of the *Trustees of Public Funds, Brandon, VT***

The Trustees of Public Funds (TOPF) is an independent fund that was established by the late Shirley Farr (1881 -1955) of Brandon, VT. Ms. Farr was indeed a philanthropic person during her lifetime. She grew up with means, and shared that wealth in many ways throughout her small community and beyond. Her father, Albert G. Farr, who grew up in Brandon but made his fortune in Chicago, had the mansion at 53 Park Street (now known as The Lilac Inn) built as the summer residence for the family. It was completed in 1909. Ms. Farr was a teacher, and an active State Legislator, involved in the rehabilitation of war victims and a concerned partner in town politics and activities. The Farr's philanthropy over the years gave Brandon the monument honoring Stephen A. Douglas, an observatory on Mount Pleasant, significant contributions to the Brandon Free Public Library, as well as our current sewer system. The Farris also donated the land to create Branbury State Park on Lake Dunmore for public recreational use. Her death at the age of 74 did not put an end to her generosity. Due to responsible economic practices and management of the Trust, Ms. Farr's estate continues to support a number of causes and establishments throughout Brandon even 70 years after her passing.

To our knowledge, the town was left two sizable gifts, one of which was unfortunately lost and the other is the trust for which we are elected to manage. The fund is governed by state statute and is operated by (3) elected officials—currently Laura Miner, Courtney Satz and Tanner Romano. The fund is invested and monitored annually for compliance with state statute. The committee for the TOPF is empowered through section 2432 and 2431 to apply trust income for the purpose for which it is held. In general, based on the recent principal balance and current market conditions, this committee has the ability to distribute approximately \$25k-35k annually from the fund.

In 1960 there was a legal opinion determined by Attorney Hanford Davis that defined the “purpose” for the fund shall be in conformance with the terms of the Will of Shirley Farr.

The will states the following:

**“primarily for proper sewage disposal, drainage of swamps and other sanitary improvements and any amounts not needed and expended for such purposes shall be used for spraying trees or in *the general improvement of the village* in ways not sufficiently provided for by taxation.”**

In 2018, the TOPF began consulting with Attorney Jim Leary to provide legal review of the TOPF, and to provide an updated opinion on how the TOPF should be applying trust income given the obsolete nature of some of the language in the last will and testament. All of Mr. Leary's work is public information and available for review for those interested.

In general, he encouraged the board to come up with a set of modernized standards for which to award the trust income given that some of the criteria established in 1960 are no longer relevant. The present board modified the criteria to stay consistent with both Shirley Farr's will and her lifetime of philanthropy. At the same time, the board also established a formal application that all applicants are required to complete when applying for funding. The application form is available to the public and can be found on the Town of Brandon website. Prior to our initiation of a formal application, it is to our knowledge that requests for funding were not documented and primarily were communicated through verbal requests.

To come up with a modernized criteria for award, Mr. Leary along with our current board, researched the items originally identified in Ms. Farr's last will and testament. Below is a summary of each item and our conclusion.

The language left in her last will and testament addresses the following items for use of the funds:

- **Primarily for proper sewage disposal**

*At the time the will was written, open sewage pits and unregulated disposal were still in existence. This is no longer applicable in today's day and age. Ms. Farr was instrumental in helping support the establishment of the municipal sewage system within the town of Brandon.*

- **Drainage of swamps**

*At the time, draining of swamps and wetlands was allowed and not regulated from what we can tell. Obviously that is no longer an acceptable environmental practice.*

- **Other sanitary purposes**

*Still applicable*

- **Spraying of trees**

*Dutch Elm disease was pervasive in Vermont both prior to and at the time of Shirley Farr's passing. Towns sprayed the insecticide DDT to control the spread of Dutch elm disease caused by elm bark beetles. Again, this outdated practice is no longer relevant today.*

- **General improvements of the village in ways not sufficiently provided by taxation**

*Still applicable*

With this research-based knowledge, we updated the criteria for awards as closely as possible from the original bequest to meet modern-day standards. The criteria is now as follows:

- **Sanitary Improvements**
- **Improvement of the Village in ways not sufficiently provided by taxation (Later clarified to include all of the town of Brandon, not just the village)**
- **Wetland and water management**

The formal application process and updated criteria we established have been in use for over 5 years now and we hope it brings transparency and uniformity to the operations of our board. Our goal as stewards of the Trust of the late Shirley Farr is to support Brandon's longevity in funding projects that encourage a vibrant community, historic preservation, education, recreation, environmental health, and the general improvement of the town she loved so dearly.

Our board meets annually with our financial advisor to review the fund, and on a fluctuating schedule primarily based upon receiving new applications. We warn our meetings through the Town of Brandon, as well as on our public Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/brandonVTTOPF/>) and we have also begun posting meetings on Front Porch Forum. Our bank statements are filed monthly with the Town Clerk and our year end report is included annually in the Town Report.

Over the past 30 years, the Trust has provided funding for a huge variety of projects including support for renovations, building updates, programming and equipment for the following: Brandon Senior Center, Brandon and Forestdale Cemeteries, Green Block project, Brandon Area Rescue Squad, Stephen A. Douglas Museum and Welcome Center, Brandon Town Band, Brandon Town Players, Town of Brandon Mosquito Control, Waterfall Park, Baptist church, United Methodist church, Brandon Boys & Girls Club, OV Football club, Brandon Free Public Library, Neshobe School playgrounds, Otter Valley Activities Association, Brandon Drive-In at Estabrook, The Reporter, Brandon Toy Project, Brandon Energy Committee Toolship, SolarFest town walking trails and more.

We hope that this overview helps community members who may not have been familiar with the Trust to understand it a little more clearly. If at any time you would like to connect with our board, our contact information is below.

*Respectfully submitted,*

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