1. LIBRARY MISSION:

The Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield’s public library, exists to initiate, nurture and feed a passion for knowledge and learning. The library offers people of all ages the materials and services necessary to satisfy an appetite for information about popular cultural and social trends and their desire for enjoyable recreational experiences; enables older children and adults to explore personal, historical and cultural heritage; provides the sophisticated information services needed to answer their questions; assists students and teachers engaged in a formal program of education through high school or homeschoolers pursuing their educational goals; and supplies the means for individuals to continue to learn throughout their lives.

2. INTRODUCTION:

The Internet, a global collection of distinct national, regional and local computer networks capable of communicating with each other through a telecommunications network, is one of the resource options the Athenaeum has for securing information. While the Internet is an immense informational storehouse, it is not always what a user might expect. It consists of a collection of independent networks, is not centrally organized, and has no table of contents or index to help a user find what is needed. Users should seek the assistance of reference librarians to help find the best sources for the needed information, which may include Internet resources, online subscription databases, and print items.

3. MISCELLANEOUS POLICY AND PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATIONS:

3.1. ACCESS: Both long and short-term Internet workstations are available at the Berkshire Athenaeum. The library utilizes an automated PC reservation management program. Patrons use their library card numbers to create reservations. Massachusetts residents without a current borrower registration will be directed to the Circulation desk to obtain a library card. As appropriate, patrons who do not qualify for a full service library card will be directed to the Circulation Desk to obtain a Computer Use Only card. Out-of-state visitors to the library will have reservations created for them by a Reference Department staff member, following presentation of identification. Persons with outstanding library debt will be denied Internet usage by the reservation management program.

3.2. CHILDREN’S USE OF THE INTERNET:

3.2.1. The Athenaeum is aware of public concerns about child safety on the Internet and cares deeply about children in our community. Policies and procedures have been put in place to ensure children have an enriching and safe online experience.

3.2.2. Children and their caregivers are encouraged to use the Internet workstation in the Children’s Library, which is reserved for their exclusive use. Further, children and their caregivers are eligible to take one of the Athenaeum’s Circulating Laptop Computers to the Children’s
Library, where the Athenaeum’s wifi service is accessible (see Circulating Laptop Policy). Children’s librarians can instruct children in the use of the Internet computers and offer assistance in locating helpful web sites to find information or search engines that are appropriate and useful for children. The library makes available printed materials intended for parents and caregivers as guides to help adults direct children’s use of the Internet.

3.2.3. While the Athenaeum does provide instruction and assistance on using the Internet, librarians cannot monitor individual use of this resource. Access to the Internet carries with it the potential to deliberately or accidentally access inaccurate, inappropriate or offensive material. Therefore, parents and guardians are encouraged to take an active role in their children’s use of the Internet, and talk to their children about their personal values, expectations and rules for safe behavior when using this resource. Parents should encourage their children to speak to the librarian if they get to a web site that makes them feel uncomfortable.

3.2.4. The Athenaeum affirms the right and responsibility of parents and legal guardians to guide their children’s use of all library resources, including the Internet, and especially their children’s access to electronic mail, chat rooms and social media. As is the case with all other library materials, any restriction of a child’s access to the Internet is the responsibility of the child’s parent or legal guardian (see WAIVER OF RESPONSIBILITY section below).

3.3. DOWNloading: The library provides access to CD disc drives and USB ports of public Internet workstations. Patrons are encouraged to save their work to removable media such as CDs or personal flash drives, as work that may appear to have been saved to the workstation’s hard drive will not be accessible after logoff. CDs are available for purchase from the Reference Department.

3.4. E-mail: The library does not establish or maintain e-mail accounts, news groups, listserves or chat-rooms for its users. E-mail and related functions may be the subject of periodic library training sessions held in the computer lab. [See also Section 3.10 on “TRAINING” in the Computer Services Policy.] Library security software may cause patrons to be unable to retrieve attachments from their e-mail accounts. Although Reference staff will make reasonable efforts to assist patrons with accessing their e-mail, under no circumstances will staff log into a patron’s email account on a staff computer.

3.5. FILTERING OR BLOCKING SOFTWARE: The American Library Association’s (ALA) policies oppose anything and anyone that prevents access to constitutionally protected speech in libraries. Because filtering software cannot distinguish between protected and unprotected speech, ALA opposes the use of filters in libraries. Despite the Supreme Court ruling on the Children’s and Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which permits the government to require libraries receiving certain kinds of federal funding to filter Internet content, ALA does not recommend the use in libraries of filtering technology that blocks constitutionally protected information. The Trustees of the Berkshire Athenaeum supports the position adopted by the American Library Association that sees the use of filtering software as an abridgement of the Library Bill of Rights, and does not use filtering software on library Internet workstations.

3.6. OBSCENE MATERIALS: The library strives to balance the rights of patrons to access all types of information resources with the rights of patrons and staff to work in a public setting free from disruptive sounds and visuals. Patrons are reminded that the library’s computer terminals are located in public areas which are shared with library users and staff of all ages, backgrounds and sensibilities. Individuals are expected to consider this diversity and respect the sensibilities of
others when accessing potentially offensive information or images. The deliberate display of obscene\(^1\) materials or child pornography\(^2\) is prohibited as a violation of Massachusetts General Law.\(^3\)

3.7. PRINTING: Printouts are available from most wired workstations at a cost of $.10 per page. See Section 7 in the Computer Services Policy for further details.

3.8. PRIVACY: In accordance with Massachusetts General Law\(^4\), the Athenaeum respects a user’s right to both confidentiality and privacy. Users are cautioned, however, that the Internet is not a secure medium. All transactions, files and communications, including the transmission of personal financial information, may be subject to access by third parties, whether legal or illegal. The library will not release information on the use of its electronic resources by the public except as required by law. Unless there is a clear violation of this policy or the law, each user is requested to respect the privacy of other computer users. Patrons should be aware that the library’s automated reservation system is in place to control and schedule access to library public Internet computers; there is no function of this program that collects, stores or reports visits to specific websites.

3.9. RESERVATIONS: The automated PC reservation software program used in the Reference Department will accept requests for use of public Internet computers in three ways:

3.9.1. Request for use of an available computer may be made at that computer workstation.

3.9.2. Request for use of the next available computer may be made at the public reservation station.

3.9.3. Request for use of a computer at a future time (up to 48 hours in advance) may be made at the public reservation station.

3.9.4. Patrons with library cards may also call the Reference Desk and request a reservation be made for them. Users arriving more than 10 minutes late for their reserved time will find the automated reservation system has cancelled their reservation.

3.9.5. While users of the Internet in the Children’s Library are required to sign in at the Children’s Library service desk, there are no reservations accepted for that workstation.

3.10. SHUT DOWN: To facilitate lock up procedures, the automated reservation system will not accept reservations that would run beyond the library’s closing time. Library computers, generally, are shut down 15 minutes before the library’s closing time.

3.11. TIME ALLOWED: Short-term Internet workstations are available for thirty (30) minute sessions. Long-term Internet workstations are available for one (1) hour sessions. Patrons are limited to two sessions per day, on any combination of workstations. Extra time on a session will be offered if the schedule of patron reservations indicates availability.

3.12. VALID USE: Patrons are cautioned that the library does not make value judgments on the nature or relative importance of information accessed by computer users or the age of the user. Library staff will not entertain requests to, for example, ask a young adult or child to conclude a

\(^1\)The standard for “obscenity” was set forth in Miller v. California, 413 U.S. 15 (1973).

\(^2\)The term “child pornography” has the meaning given such term in section 2256 of Title 18, United States Code.

\(^3\) MGL, Chapter 272, Section 29: Crimes Against Morality, Good Order - Dissemination or Possession of Obscene Matter; and Chapter 272, Section 31: Crimes Against Morality, Good Order - Definitions.

\(^4\)M.G.L., Chapter 78, section 7: Public Libraries - Establishment by Cities and Towns; Records
session of using game or cartoon related sites in deference to an adult who has to accomplish her/his work. All patrons may use their allotment of computer time in the fashion they desire, providing it does not otherwise violate library policy. Those who feel some urgency in their need to access a library computer are encouraged to make their reservations in a timely fashion.

3.13. **VALIDITY:** Internet users are cautioned to examine carefully the authority, currency and accuracy of any information obtained over the Internet as well as the validity of its source.

3.14. **WAIVER OF RESPONSIBILITY:**
3.14.1. The Berkshire Athenaeum does not actively monitor and has no control over the information accessed through the Internet and cannot be held responsible for its content, authority, reliability, currency or use. Neither the Board of trustees of the Berkshire Athenaeum, the Athenaeum staff, nor the City of Pittsfield is liable for any negative consequences that may occur as a result of using the library’s Internet connection.

3.14.2. The Berkshire Athenaeum is a strong advocate for free speech and free expression so long as it is not at odds with applicable state and/or federal law. As with other library materials, the library affirms the parent’s or legal guardian’s right and responsibility for monitoring their children’s use of electronic resources. The Athenaeum rejects attempts to censor electronic communications. It is not possible for library staff to control specific information library users may locate on the Internet because the resources available are constantly changing. Just as libraries do not vouch for or endorse the viewpoints of written material in their collections, they do not do so for electronic information. Selection policies, which serve the more traditional library materials, may not apply to material accessed electronically. It is the responsibility of the user (or parent, guardian or caregiver) to determine what is appropriate. The Athenaeum expects parents who are concerned about their children’s use of electronic resources to provide guidance to their own children.

3.14.3. The Berkshire Athenaeum has a responsibility to provide material and information presenting all points of view, and the Athenaeum supports access to all formats of material to meet the user’s informational needs, regardless of the user’s age or the content of the material. Parents concerned about their children’s use of electronic resources are ultimately responsible for setting standards and establishing guidelines, and may wish to spend time online with their children to discuss the wealth of information available.