

BOARD OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

March 18, 2025

A meeting of the Board of Library Trustees was held on Tuesday, March 18, at the Perry Hall Library. The meeting was called to order at 8:08 am by Board President Yara Cheikh. Other Board members present were: Claudia Cruz, Pamela Lin-Chen, and Anne West. Ms. Walsh David, Ms. Ganguly, and Mr. Netzer were absent.

Staff in attendance: Sonia Alcántara-Antoine, Chief Executive Officer; James Cooke, Chief Operations Officer; Jen Evans, Executive Assistant; Emily Gamertsfelder, Planning & Projects Manager; Alexandra Houff, Digital Equity and Virtual Services Manager; Cindy Kleback, Perry Hall Library Manager; Robin Linton, Human Resources Director; and Helen Rowe, Fiscal Services Director.

COMMUNICATION

Minutes

The Board approved the minutes of the February 18, 2025, meeting **West/Cruz**.

Correspondence

The Board received notification from BCPL's Purchasing Agent that a sole source purchase over \$25,000 had been approved by the CEO to replace critical equipment for the Graphics department. At the request of Ms. Sharonda Dillard-Huffman, the Board received the results of a recent PIA request regarding correspondence with her name.

Upcoming Events

The CEO highlighted An Afternoon with Colson Whitehead at Goucher's Kraushaar Auditorium on April 6, National Library Week April 9-12, and the screenings of *Free for All: Inside the Public Library* Cockeysville, Pikesville, and Loch Raven.

Comments from the Public

The Board heard comments from Ms. Sharonda Dillard-Huffman regarding the cancellation of a meeting room booking in February.

REPORTS

CEO's Report (Alcántara-Antoine)

The CEO shared that two staff members will be receiving awards from the Maryland Library Association. Nay Keppler, Woodlawn Library Manager, has been selected to receive the 2025 Libraries Change Communities Award. Shirley Mason, Woodlawn Library Circulation Manager, has been selected to receive the 2025 Outstanding Support Staff Award.

A recent social media post highlighting BCPL's dual parent/child study carrels went viral with more than a million views.

These successes are a reminder that BCPL makes a difference, and that BCPL staff serve their community with pride and distinction.

An executive order issued by the Trump administration on March 14, called for the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. IMLS is the nation's only federal agency for America's libraries. IMLS is an independent federal agency that supports libraries and museums through grantmaking, research and policy development. Maryland gets \$3.3 million from IMLS' Grants to States program. Those dollars are then distributed to Maryland libraries. BCPL uses these funds towards staff training and development, and towards the long-term lending program. BCPL also participates in educational programming for customers funded by IMLS like the upcoming program *Understanding AI- What It Can and Cannot Do*.

The impact and return on investment of these dollars is significant to our organization and to our community, even though the dollar amount is small. IMLS draws less than 0.003% of the annual federal budget yet has had an enormous impact on communities nationwide. From technology classes for jobseekers to services for people with disabilities, from library delivery for older Americans to summer reading programs for families, IMLS funding makes a real, concrete difference in the lives of Americans every day.

A Continuing Resolution was passed to fund the Federal Government through September 30, 2025. To this end, it is believed that IMLS and their Grants to States will have funding through September 30, 2025. What happens after September 30 is unknown. It is vital that MLSA gets reauthorized and funding for states continues.

Perry Hall Branch (Kleback)

Ms. Kleback shared an overview service at the Perry Hall Branch. The branch opened in 2009, but there has been a library in the Perry Hall community for 60 years. With Angel Park, an all-inclusive playground next door, the branch has a focus of serving teens and adults with developmental disabilities. The also serves as a community gathering place. Ms. Kleback and her staff look forward to welcoming customers who would normally visit the White Marsh Branch during their closure for renovation.

Statistical Dashboard – Gamertsfelder

Ms. Gamertsfelder shared the Statistical Dashboard. Library use is beginning to increase as the year progresses.

Operations (Cooke)

Mr. Cooke shared that the renovation of the White Marsh Branch restrooms, meeting room, and lobby is set to begin on March 31. The branch will be closed for several months and should reopen during the summer. The Woodlawn temporary space should be ready for move-in by September. Around the system: seven meeting rooms will receive a refresh with fresh paint and

new AV equipment; the castle in the children's area at Towson has been repainted and redecorated; the exterior digital signage project for Woodlawn and North Point branches has started; and a study room has been added to the Parkville Branch.

Fiscal Services Report (Rowe)

Ms. Rowe shared that there was nothing out of the ordinary to report this month but noted that energy costs were slightly lower in February.

Human Resources and Collective Bargaining Update (Linton)

Ms. Linton shared highlights of her written report to the Board. Ms. Linton has been with BCPL for a little over a year. Over the past month her team has been working to maximize the number of staff who can attend training, has conducted a supervisor's focus group, standardized operating processes, started the Bilingual Policy Implementation Team, attended a job fair. Ms. Linton has also been visiting branches to observe operations.

Ms. Cheikh how the search to fill HR vacancies was progressing. Ms. Linton shared that interviews for open positions were in process.

Digital Equity (Houff)

Ms. Houff discussed the work of the Digital Equity and Virtual Services department (DEVS). Ms. Houff and her team have distributed more than 3000 Chromebooks to qualifying customers and helped those customers sign up for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Unfortunately, the ACP is no longer being funded by the federal government and DEVS has worked diligently to find additional sources of funding to increase the number of hotspots available for long-term loan to customers to help bridge the gap. DEVS has provided digital skills training in shelters, libraries, and at CCBC. DEVS will be providing a staff-focused Digital Divide Simulation to increase understanding of the experience of being on the wrong side of the digital divide. Ms. Houff has worked to bring in grant funding of \$274,000 for projects in her department.

All this work has not gone unnoticed, DEVS has won several awards including Baltimore County Digital Trailblazers 2022 & 2024, Urban Libraries Council honorable mention for ACP Event Kits in 2023, and the Citizens for Maryland Libraries Davis McCarn Technology Award in 2024. The department's work has not gone unnoticed by their BCPL peers, and DEVS was awarded a 2023 Staff Merit Award and a 2024 Group Project Award.

The Board praised the work Ms. Houff and her team are doing and the impact it has to change customers' lives.

Board Report (Cheikh)

Ms. Cheikh thanked the Perry Hall staff for hosting our meeting this month.

Ms. Cheikh spoke about the current economic uncertainty and the fiscal challenges Baltimore County will face. She expressed her appreciation of the work the CEO and her team do to increase efficiency and maximize the funds BCPL receives. As part of the agenda, the Board will be establishing a Finance Committee in accordance with the bylaws. This will ensure that the

Board is well informed to support BCPL and advocate for funding the system to the best of the County's ability.

Ms. Cheikh then shared a statement from the Freedom to Read Foundation:

“On March 14, 2025, President Trump issued an Executive Order directing that “to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law,” all non-statutory components and functions of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) be eliminated, and that those agency functions mandated by law be reduced to a minimum.

IMLS was created by Congress to assure that federal resources would be available to improve and support the nation's public libraries, drawing on decades of legislation acknowledging the need for all citizens to have access to free public libraries to improve their lives and their ability to fully participate in our society, our economy, and the political process.

America's libraries are the primary means of connecting people to information and ideas, providing opportunities for lifelong learning, cultural enrichment, and civic engagement. They serve as anchor institutions for their communities, providing access to technology, government information, and career and educational resources. People who visit and use the resources provided by libraries in cities, rural areas, and tribal lands have all benefited from state grants, programs, or initiatives funded or supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Eliminating or reducing IMLS will deny students, families, entrepreneurs, small businesses, and communities' access to an essential public service.”

Ms. Cheikh urged everyone to contact their federal elected officials and ask for the funding to be restored and that the Board remain vigilant to the political landscape and its repercussion for our library system. BCPL is a tangible expression of the First Amendment and the promise that all people have the opportunity to learn, create, read, explore, connect and grow.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Appointment of Board Finance Committee (Cheikh)

Ms. Cheikh read a draft resolution to create a Board Finance Committee which will consist of three members appointed by the Board President. Ms. West requested that the resolution be amended to indicate that one of the members of the committee will be the Board Treasurer. The Board approved the resolution with this change (**West/Lin-Chen**). The members of the Finance Committee will be Ms. Cheikh, Ms. Ganguly, and Mr. Netzer.

Draft FY 2026 Budget (Rowe)

More clarification has been made by the County. The CEO and Ms. Rowe will work with the Finance Committee to develop the final budget request.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 08:55 am (**West/Lin-Chen**).

Submitted by

Claudia Cruz

Secretary to the Board of Library Trustees