

## **BOARD OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

**May 20, 2025**

A meeting of the Board of Library Trustees was held on Tuesday, May 20, at the Sollers Point Library. The meeting was called to order at 8:00 am by Board President Yara Cheikh. Other Board members present were Pamela Lin-Chen, Claudia Cruz, and Maureen Walsh David. Mike Netzer arrived at 8:01 am and Havaca Ganguly arrived at 8:11 am. Anne West was absent.

Staff in attendance: Sonia Alcántara-Antoine, Chief Executive Officer; James Cooke, Chief Operations Officer; Jessica Cordova, New Americans Outreach Specialist; Jen Evans, Executive Assistant; Emily Gamertsfelder, Planning, Projects & Data Manager; Robin Linton, Director of Human Resources; Helen Rowe, Director of Fiscal Services; Elizabeth Slack, Sollers Point Branch Manager; and Connie Strittmatter, Youth and Family Engagement Manager.

### **COMMUNICATION**

#### ***Minutes***

The Board approved the minutes of the April 15, 2025, meeting **(Walsh David/Lin-Chen)**.

#### ***Correspondence***

None.

#### ***Upcoming Events***

The CEO highlighted The Big Give, Summer Reading kickoff, and the distribution of gun safety locks in partnership with Baltimore County.

#### ***Comments from the Public***

None.

### **REPORTS**

#### ***CEO's Report (Alcántara-Antoine)***

The CEO often highlights the many programs and services offered by BCPL that improve the quality of life for residents and transform lives. Often that transformation happens at the library; BCPL's facilities are direct vehicles for exploration, learning, and discovery. But community outreach does not get as much attention.

Half of Baltimore County residents have a relationship with the library. The library also works to identify who is in the other half and how to connect with them.

Not everyone has a library close to them. Not everyone can get to the library because they are homebound or lack transportation. There might be language barriers preventing people from connecting with the library. Although BCPL is open 60+ hours a week, those hours will not be convenient for everyone. Not everyone knows what the library has to offer them, and it is not realistic to expect everyone to come to BCPL. BCPL does not passively wait for people to find us. Outreach is how BCPL brings the library experience to the community. Outreach raises awareness of library services and allows BCPL to build critical relationships and trust with new audiences.

BCPL's entire public services staff, the Adult and Community Engagement team, and the Youth and Family Engagement team spend a lot of time out in the community, meeting people where they are. Library outreach is critically important because it extends the impact of libraries beyond physical walls and ensures that *everyone* in the community has access to knowledge, resources, and services—especially those who might otherwise be left out.

#### ***Sollers Point Branch (Slack)***

Ms. Slack discussed the Sollers Point Multi-Purpose Center and the history of the Turner's Station community. This facility, shared with Baltimore County Parks and Recreation, features a 5,000 sq. ft. Library, a gymnasium, an auditorium that seats 300, two classrooms, a computer center, and a local history room. The facilities amenities are heavily used by the community and the library has become a gathering space.

#### ***Operations (Cooke)***

Mr. Cooke shared several project updates. The Woodlawn renovation has received all necessary permits. The project will next be sent out to bid which should allow construction to begin in September. The Randallstown renovation is now moving forward after discussions of updated funding. The joint use building will be called the "Liberty Road Government Complex." Essex is on track to have 30% drawings soon. The White Marsh meeting room and restroom renovation is at 40% completion. Sollers Point will be receiving new furniture and have a manager's office this month. Completed projects include renovations at Storyville Rosedale and the North Point study room.

#### ***Fiscal Services Report (Rowe)***

Ms. Rowe shared the Finance Report. Revenues are slightly above expenses, but the variance is becoming smaller as departments finalize end-of-year purchases.

Ms. Walsh David asked about the variance in grant funds and Ms. Rowe briefly discussed the process.

#### ***Human Resources Report (Linton)***

In the Human Resources Report, Ms. Linton shared that the department continues recruitment for open positions. The department has also finalized training related to the implementation of

the Heat Related Illness Prevention Plan. Ms. Linton has also just wrapped up Supervisor Focus Groups and will be considering ways to incorporate the feedback given by attendees.

Ms. Walsh David expressed her approval of the report format and information.

Mr. Netzer asked if BCPL had ever done a staff satisfaction survey. CEO Alcántara-Antione shared that BCPL staff had participated in a Quality of Worklife Survey, but that survey has been paused as staff did not feel that the survey was sufficiently anonymous.

Dr. Lin-Chen asked if the staff using FMLA leave, noted in the report, were from around the system or all in one place? Ms. Linton shared that the staff were from several locations. Soon, Human Resources will be reviewing leave-of-absence policies in general.

### ***Operational Plan (Gamertsfelder)***

Ms. Gamertsfelder reviewed selected items from the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter Operational Plan.

Ms. Walsh David expressed her disappointment that there is not a way to quantify the impact the plan goals have on the community and requested that Ms. Gamertsfelder consider this for the next Strategic Plan.

Ms. Gamertsfelder shared that the Board would be approving a consultant to guide the planning process next month.

### ***New Americans (Cordova)***

Ms. Cordova provided the Board with a written report and shared highlights of her first year as New Americans Outreach Specialist. New American communities face increased uncertainty due to federal enforcement. BCPL in partnership with CASA and a certified immigration attorney, has initiated “Know Your Rights” programs to inform New Americans about the citizenship process and their rights under current laws. BCPL has also been providing “red cards” at outreach events that provide carriers with a summary of their rights.

Ms. Cheikh stressed the importance of the work Ms. Cordova was doing and Ms. Walsh David shared that during a visit to Towson Library, she witnessed the joy a family felt in easily finding materials in Spanish.

Ms. Cordova noted the utility of the new Pocket Talk translation devices available in every branch. The devices were funded by a grant from the Foundation for BCPL. Ms. Cordova will be using one when she attends a fair for the Burmese community in Arbutus.

### ***Board Report (Cheikh)***

Ms. Cheikh shared that this month’s statistical dashboard and strategic plan update demonstrated BCPL’s growth in programming and the overall number of customers utilizing our services. These increases are a testament to the CEO’s leadership and the commitment and expertise of our employees. There is so much to celebrate in BCPL.

Ms. Cheikh expressed the Board’s appreciation to the County Executive and County Council. The current budget includes an additional \$10 million for the Liberty Road Government Complex.

This additional funding will bring BCPL closer to a first of its kind collaboration between BCPL and Baltimore County Recreation and Parks that will result in an extraordinary space where residents will have access to a state-of-the-art library and resources that will give residents opportunities to learn more, be healthier, and thrive in the world.

Ms. Cheikh thanked the Sollers Point staff and manager. Their community has a unique history in the County that is celebrated now but bears the burden of years of underinvestment. The Sollers Point Library serves as a haven and hub for residents.

Ms. Cheikh thanked BCPL staff for helping over 1000 residents file their taxes and noted that it was an unusual job for librarians. All involved demonstrated that the library is a place of transformation and innovation, and the Board applauded their efforts to meet the ever-changing needs of residents.

Ms. Cheikh also praised BCPL's collaboration with CASA in serving as a different kind of haven for new Americans – BCPL is open to all and understands that liberty in the United States is a fundamental value that must be practiced and lived to be sustained. The work of Ms. Cordova and her team is fundamental to BCPL's mission to encourage and celebrate diversity by being inclusive and finding ways to serve that provide greater equity.

#### ***Summer Reading & Youth Programming (Strittmatter)***

Ms. Strittmatter summarized Summer Reading Challenge 2024 and shared some statistics with the Board. In 2024 BCPL had 12,029 registered participants with 4,857 completing. Branch participation goals for 2025 are modestly higher. BCPL also uses Summer Reading as an opportunity to reach out to youth, with 1,193 Service-Learning Hours earned by teens. With Vision to Learn, BCPL facilitated 384 eye exams to qualifying children. In partnership with BCPS exams. Twelve BCPL locations served 6,631 meals over last summer. An additional 4 branches will participate in 2025, as the youth poverty level has risen in several areas of the County.

Ms. Strittmatter was excited to share that the Owings Mills Branch will host *Read Out Proud: A Celebration of LGBTQ+ Stories and Voices* this fall. This two-part programming series will take place over Banned Books Week and LGBTQ+ History Month in October. These programs reinforce the library's role as a safe, inclusive place. They connect to BCPL's mission to provide mirrors and windows through programming. Ms. Strittmatter encouraged the Board to endorse the programs and messaging with public support and attendance at one or more of the programs.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

##### ***Appointment of Nominating Committee (Cheikh)***

Ms. Cheikh appointed Ms. Walsh David, Ms. Cruz, and Ms. Lin-Chen to the Nominating Committee. The committee will report at the June 2025 meeting.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 08:57 am **(Netzer/Lin-Chen)**.

Submitted by

Claudia Cruz

Secretary to the Board of Library Trustees