

BOARD OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

February 17, 2026

A meeting of the Board of Library Trustees was held on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at the Towson Library. The meeting was called to order at 8:00 am by Board President Yara Cheikh. Other Board members present were Maureen Walsh David, Claudia Cruz, Havaca Ganguly, Pamela Lin-Chen, and Anne West. Mr. Netzer was absent.

Staff in attendance: Erin Baker, Chief Public Services Officer; Ann Beegle, Chief External Affairs Officer; James Cooke, Chief Operations Officer; Jen Evans, Executive Assistant; Linda Frederick, Marketing & Communication Strategy Manager, Emily Gamertsfelder, Planning, Projects, and Data Manager; Justin Hartzell, Capital Projects Manager; Rachael Jackson, Chief Steward; and Helen Rowe, Director of Fiscal Services.

M. Martha Greenway from Greenway Strategy Group joined the Board via Zoom to present staff survey results.

COMMUNICATION

Minutes

The Board approved the minutes of the January 20, 2026, meeting **(Walsh David/West)**.

Correspondence

The Board received correspondence via email that will be placed on file.

Changes to the Agenda

The Board voted to move the Human Resources policy updates to the March agenda **(West/Ganguly)**.

Upcoming Events

The Booked for BCPL with Jennifer Weiner is sold out. Other upcoming events include, the Lunar New Year author visit with Gene Luen Yang, programs for Black History Month.

Comments from the Public

The Board heard comments from BCPL Union President Anita Bass. Ms. Bass would like the 8am meeting start time to change, and to have additional time for public comments. Ms. Bass stated that the Union had not seen the draft Human Resources policies and that voting on them might lead to grievance.

REPORTS

Staff Survey

In late 2025, Greenway Strategy Group was asked to develop a series of employee engagement sessions and an online employee survey to collect data about organizational culture. Employee engagement

sessions were held in December, and 73 staff participated. From these sessions, nine areas for improvement were identified:

- allow greater branch control and flexibility
- assess BCPL structure and positions and adjust to best meet customer needs;
- communicate information transparently, clearly, and concisely
- engage employees in decision that affect them
- increase and enhance employee development
- increase collaboration between and among administration and branches
- stop managing the library as a corporation
- stop monitoring employee's behavior for minor occurrences
- work collaboratively with the union.

Employees were also provided an opportunity to participate in an anonymous online survey that was based on 2021 Quality of Worklife Survey questions; staff members are treated with dignity, respect and appreciations at BCPL; I have the opportunity to provide input and feedback on decisions that affect my job; overall, I am satisfied with BCPL as an employer. Positive perceptions have significantly declined across all three statements.

Survey takers were then asked to rank the areas for improvement, the top four were: stop managing the library as a corporation; communicate information transparently, clearly, and concisely; engage employees in decisions that affect them; allow greater branch control and flexibility.

Operations

Mr. Cooke shared operational updates with the Board. A Request for Proposal for Executive Recruiting Services has been issued, and proposals are due on March 13, and a Request for Information for Interim Executive Director was issued with proposals due by March 18.

The new Digital Equity and Virtual Services Manager, Don Osborn, will start on February 23. Mr. Osborn is an experienced library, management, and IT professional who brings a wide range of expertise to his role.

Mr. Cooke and Mr. Hartzell presented BCPL's Capital Improvement Plan to the Baltimore County Planning Board. BCPL's priorities for the next 5 years are the new buildings for the Randallstown and Essex libraries.

BCPL has received requests for the reconsideration of the children's picture book *P is for Palestine*, BCPL will follow the process to address collection concerns outlined in the Collection Development Policy.

Capital Projects

Mr. Hartzell shared the Capital Projects Dashboard and shared that the project to repair the exterior stairs at Loch Raven will begin soon. Access will be restored during the project by the construction of temporary stairs. New wall protection has been installed at the Pikesville library, and the area has been repainted. Replacement of the server room HVAC in the Administrative Office should begin at the end of February.

Statistical Dashboard

Ms. Gamertsfelder shared the Statistical Dashboard and noted that the decrease in PC and Wi-Fi sessions is due in part to the reduction in computers for customer use at the Woodlawn temporary locations, and that notary service ended in January.

External Affairs

Ms. Frederick presented highlights prepared by Ms. Beegle.

Government Affairs

Twenty-five staff members and volunteers attended Library Legislative Day in Annapolis on February 10. The top priority was to express BCPL's gratitude for all they do on behalf of BCPL and to advocate for their support of a \$500,000 bond initiative request for the new Essex library branch.

BCPL has been awarded \$2 million in Congressionally Directed Spending, also known as a federal earmark, for the new Essex library branch.

The County Executive's Town Hall meetings continue, and BCPL staff have been present to promote services.

Philanthropy

The Foundation is working in partnership with the Baltimore County government in securing grant funds to help celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation.

Three of the four authors for the next series of *Booked for Baltimore County* have been secured, and the Foundation looks forward to sharing that news in the weeks ahead.

The Philanthropy team is also working on an April campaign to coincide with National Library Giving Day and National Library Week, highlighting the vital role libraries, librarians and the staff play in fostering communities and supporting literacy.

Adult & Community Engagement (ACE)

ACE will be offering another series of Entrepreneur Academy virtually.

Spotlight on Caregiving programs, made possible by a grant from the Department of Aging, began in February and will continue throughout the year across the system.

Owings Mills branch and ACE will host our 8th annual Book Lovers Bash.

Thanks to a grant from Wellspan, staff from administration and the Towson branch came together and assembled 200 Winter Care Kits for individuals that are unhoused or housing insecure and need assistance. Special thanks to Ellie Camlin, Social Work Supervisor, for organizing this initiative, and all the staff who helped.

Youth and Family Engagement (YFE)

The Winter Reading Challenge ended with 1,146 registrations and 804 completions.

YFE spent a lot of time in January distributing materials to branches: new on-the-floor play items, story time supplies, Summer Reading registration incentive books, teen service-learning hour project materials, programming kits, and more.

Markus Zusak is visiting the Owings Mills from Australia to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his beloved novel, *The Book Thief*.

Elementary and Middle School Battle of the Books author visits start in March.

Marketing

BCPL gained 176 new followers on the system's social media accounts last month and engaged paid social media campaigns to promote several programs.

Public Services

Ms. Baker asked the three new Branch Managers to introduce themselves. Mr. Mason, Ms. Crews, and Ms. Smith shared a little bit about their careers with BCPL.

Ms. Baker has been busy visiting branches and meeting with a variety of individual staff and management groups. She anticipates having completed visits to all BCPL locations by the end of the month. She is attending all the County Executive's Town Hall meetings to have a greater understanding of the communities served by BCPL.

Individual Branch Reports will be shared starting next month, but Ms. Baker highlighted the Teens Mid-Year Check-In at Catonsville; the Black History Month program highlighting the Harvey's and a presentation on the life of Edgar Allen Poe at Perry Hall; passport processing and Library at Lunch at White Marsh. There are over 40 Black History Month events at BCPL this month as well as programs highlighting Lunar New Year.

Ms. Baker also shared that Ms. Miller will be presenting at the Public Library Association conference to share a model of the diversity education program developed for BCPL, Beginning Conversations.

Fiscal Services

Ms. Rowe reported that revenues are greater than expenses by \$224,000 (0.73%). This represents a smaller positive variance than in December 2025. However, there has been no need to use prior fund balance. There were no significant changes in any of the revenue categories and expenses for salaries remain 3.2% below budget.

Ms. Rowe and Ms. Cheikh met with the County to submit BCPL's Stage 1 Budget Request. This included a review of December year-to-date and projected FY 2026 revenues and expenditures; a vacancy report; and the increases and decreases in the FY 2027 budget request versus the FY 2026 adopted budget. Ms. Rowe felt the County was receptive to BCPL's request and has not heard of any potential decreases. Stage 2 documents will be completed and submitted soon.

BCPL has learned that the State will be shifting some State Pension costs to Counties. Baltimore County has accounted for those costs in their Retirement Budget, and there should be no impact for BCPL in FY 2027.

Human Resources

The Board received a written Human Resources Report.

Union Report

Ms. Jackson thanked Ms. Cheikh for her support of the bill to give supervisory employees' right to seek collective bargaining.

There were no grievances in January.

The Union supports the acquisition of a new, more efficient Human Resources Information System. Replacement of this system would benefit staff by allowing for the timely processing of changes to employee records.

Ms. Jackson shared the Union's concern regarding outdated Employee Handbook sections. The contract supersedes the handbook, and more support is needed in updating the Employee Handbook to eliminate confusion and vague terminology.

It has been requested that the "part-time librarian policy" be shared on SharePoint for all staff to refer to.

Ms. Jackson shared some health and safety concerns including continuing issues with the HVAC in the Perry Hall workroom, and a treefall at Rosedale.

Ms. Cheikh thanked Ms. Jackson for her report.

Board Report

Ms. Cheikh thanked the staff and Trustees who participated in Library Legislative Day in Annapolis for their advocacy on behalf of BCPL.

Ms. Cheikh thanked Ms. Rowe and her team for their diligence in developing a budget, in consultation with the Board, for FY 2027. The request aligns with the mission of BCPL and prioritizes staffing in branches.

Ms. Cheikh thanked the Foundation for organizing the Booked for BCPL event Sunday, February 22nd.

Ms. Cheikh thanked the Human Resources department for the summary of their work to date and all those at the table who worked collaboratively on our labor agreement. She appreciates the progress shown by the significant increase in recruitment for open positions and the training opportunities that are being offered internally.

The Board appreciated hearing from Greenway Strategy and Ms. Gamertsfelder regarding the staff survey. She noted that there is work to be done to ensure staff feel valued. The Board has taken steps in the last months to ensure that the has acted on promises made at the November meeting. The Board continues to take steps to demonstrate their commitment to staff and the community.

Ms. Cheikh shared an update on the Executive Director search. A Request for Proposal has been posted to find a firm or agency to conduct a national search for a new, permanent, Executive Director. A

Request for Information was issued to secure an interim Executive Director during the search process. Information about both will be shared in the weeks ahead. Ms. Cheikh thanked Mr. Cooke, Ms. Beegle, and Ms. Baker for their leadership and collaboration.

Ms. Cheikh was in Annapolis recently in person and virtually, and has joined BCPL Union President, Anita Bass, in giving testimony in favor of a bill that will allow library supervisors the right to organize. This is a right across all other State jurisdictions. The bill has passed favorably through the Baltimore County delegation.

Ms. Cheikh wanted to remind all that the library is one of the most important democratic institutions in our country. Every day, BCPL ensures that residents have free access to information, technology, lifelong learning, and one another. She stated that when access to information is limited, voices are silenced, or when communities feel disconnected from civic life, democracy weakens. That is why BCPL's work matters so deeply. In helping a resident apply for a job online, guiding a new American through available resources, hosting public forums, supporting small businesses, or teaching digital literacy, BCPL strengthens the very foundation of civic participation.

Ms. Cheikh ended her report with the statement that the struggle to protect democratic values is not abstract or distant — it plays out here at home. BCPL is on the front lines of that effort, not through politics, but through access, inclusion, and opportunity. Democracy thrives when communities are informed, connected, and engaged. Baltimore County is stronger because BCPL provides that foundation every single day.

OLD BUSINESS

FY 2027 MOU with IAMAW

The Board approved the FY 2027 MOU with IAMAW (**Walsh David/Ganguly**).

NEW BUSINESS

Policy – Multilingual Pay Policy

The Board approved the Multilingual Pay Policy (**Cruz/West**).

Appointment of Bylaws Committee

Ms. Cheikh called for a motion to create a Bylaws Committee (**Lin-Chen/West**) and appointed Dr. Lin-Chen, Ms. Walsh David, and Ms. Ganguly. The committee will review the current Bylaws and submit edits for approval at the April Board meeting.

CLOSED SESSION AND ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Cheikh called for a motion to close the public portion of the meeting at 9:35 am under General Provisions Article § 3-305 (b) (1) to consider personnel matters related to a specific employee or employees and to adjourn from closed session (**West/Cruz**). Aye: Cheikh, Cruz, Ganguly, Lin-Chen, West, and Walsh David. Absent: Mr. Netzer. Mr. Cooke and Ms. Baker were present for portions of the closed session.

A statement about the closed session will be provided at the next regular meeting of the Board.

Submitted by

Claudia Cruz

Secretary to the Board of Library Trustees