

BOARD OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

January 20, 2026

A meeting of the Board of Library Trustees was held on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at the Towson Library. The meeting was called to order at 8:02 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; Emily Gamertsfelder, Planning, Projects, and Data Manager; Justin Hartzell, Capital Projects Manager; Rachael Jackson, Chief Steward; Michelle Romney, Acting Human Resources Director; and Helen Rowe, Director of Fiscal Services.

Also, in attendance virtually was Patty Foglesong from Greenway Strategy Group.

COMMUNICATION

Minutes

The Board approved the minutes of December 16, 2025, and January 8, 2026, meetings **(Walsh David/Ganguly)**.

Correspondence

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

Changes to the Agenda

None.

Upcoming Events

Ms. Beegle highlighted Booked for BCPL with Jennifer Weiner, the Lunar New Year author visit with Gene Luen Yang, programs with Culture Queen for Black History Month.

Comments from the Public

The Board heard comments from BCPL union representative Anita Bass and community member Nicole Dvorak. Ms. Bass asked the Board to reconsider the 8 am start time of the Board meetings and the two minute limit to public comments, and to make the part-time librarian position permanent. Ms. Dvorak requested more detail be added to the Board minutes around the Finance Report and expressed disappointment in Ms. Cheikh's leadership and called for her to resign.

REPORTS

Strategic Plan XII

Ms. Gamertsfelder introduced Ms. Foglesong of Greenway Strategy Group for an update on the progress of work for the development of Strategic Plan XII. Greenway has conducted focus groups, community

and staff input sessions, and other conversations to solicit input. Priority outcomes, strategic themes, and objectives have been identified. Updates will be made to the strategic framework, and BCPL strategy teams made up of staff from a range of locations and positions will work to develop initiatives to meet the plan objectives.

Operations

Mr. Cooke shared operational updates with the Board.

In FY 2025, Collection Development ordered more than 290,000 items that were then processed by Cataloging and Processing. Cataloging and Processing sent roughly 5,000 items per week out to the branches to be available to customers.

A candidate to fill the vacancy for the Digital Equity and Virtual Services Manager has been identified.

A project to replace the HVAC in the Administrative Office IT Server Room is being planned. The HVAC replacement at North Point is progressing. The project will now require that the branch be closed during the final phase as it will be quite disruptive to activities inside the branch. The closure is anticipated to be this summer.

Public Services

Ms. Baker introduced herself. She shared that she has found staff to be passionate and committed to public service and looks forward to working collaboratively with them.

External Affairs

Ms. Beegle shared one of the County Executive's legislative priorities is a request for \$15 million for the new Essex Library. Maryland Library Legislative Day is February 10, and Mr. White is organizing the group that will attend from BCPL. Trustees are welcome to attend the day with staff. BCPL will also have a presence at the upcoming county Town Hall meetings.

Ms. Beegle also provided an update from the departments that are part of External Affairs.

Marketing & Communications

WJZ covered the winter break campaign, including the Winter Reading Challenge, Storyville, Noon Year's Eve, and other winter break programs. Several media outlets covered BCPL's "Top Books of 2025." Marketing & Communications also organized paid advertising including a "Winter Break – Cure for Boredom" campaign. BCPL is also featured on placemats at 13 diners across Baltimore County.

BCPL's social media presence continues to gain momentum with 533 new followers across all platforms, reaching 174,474 with posts for the month.

Partnerships & Public Programs

BCPL is in the process of replacing stationary computers in children's sections, with a more flexible tablet model. The project is being piloted in three branches.

Adult & Community Engagement (ACE)

The department arranged for author Christine Kuehn's appearance at the Pikesville Branch to talk about her book *Family of Spies*. The 110 attendees heard her story of her family members who spied for the Nazis in Hawaii before Pearl Harbor.

The team also hosted a virtual "lunch and learn" program called *Understanding Social Security*, where members of the Association of Financial Educators covered topics like eligibility and filing for benefits. All the participants were eager for the next virtual program on a similar topic, *Understanding Medicare*.

BPCL is participating in Career Success Month, which is a statewide initiative among Maryland public libraries to build employment skills and advancement opportunities by strengthening Maryland's workforce, businesses, partnerships, and communities.

A grant from the Baltimore County Department of Aging will allow BCPL to provide a variety of programs to support caregivers.

Ms. Camlin, the Social Work Supervisor, and Philanthropy and Partnerships staff won a grant from WellPoint for supplies for winter care kits. Staff will be assembling the kits and preparing for distribution throughout the system.

Youth & Family Engagement (YFE)

YFE supported Noon Year's Eve programs at 9 branches across the county, which saw almost 1,500 people attend total.

YFE has been working with branches on a flexible model of teen service-learning hour programming called *Be Involved*. Six branches hosted the program in December and saw around 70 people completing projects to better the community.

YFE has developed a kit that branches will be able to borrow to reduce repeated purchase of the same items and hopefully expand this popular program to other branches.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy surpassed their year-end campaign goal of \$100,000, thanks in large part to the very generous \$100,000 challenge match from Trustee Anne West.

Philanthropy staff are planning our upcoming events with Jennifer Weiner and Percival Everett. Additionally, we continue to make progress towards securing authors for our 2026/27 *Booked for Baltimore County* season.

So far this fiscal year, the Foundation has received eight private foundation grants totaling \$58,500 and two public grants totaling \$51,000.

Foundation for BCPL is taking the lead in coordinating the funding for the Maryland 250 celebrations around Baltimore County with several grant applications in progress totaling \$40,000.

Fiscal Services

Ms. Rowe reported that revenues are greater than expenses by \$282,000, and there has been no use of fund balance. While BCPL has received \$252,000 in Foundation grant income, grant income is 20% below budget. Salaries are currently 3.2% below budget, but that variance will be reduced as vacancies are filled and the COLA is in effect for the remainder of the year.

Human Resources

Ms. Romney reviewed the Human Resources Report. BCPL had 509 active employees, and 19 recruitments are in progress. There were no grievances last month.

Human Resources staff also coordinated a systemwide Staff in Service Day, attended a statewide Staff Development Coordinator meeting, updated the HR system with benefit and COLA related changes.

Negotiations with the Union have concluded, and the draft document was ratified. The Board will review the document for signature in February. Collaboration with the Union is ongoing regarding the Longevity Plan and the Multi-lingual Pay Policy.

Union Report

Ms. Jackson reviewed the Union Report. Negotiations ended in December, and the document was ratified on January 17th. There are three new stewards and Ms. Bass, Union President, has been visiting branches during lunch hours to talk with staff while they are not on work time.

There are no new grievances. The grievance on behalf of the 14 part-time librarians has been settled, and new language will be added to the MOU regarding advance notice to the union, steward representation, and recall rights.

The Union is concerned that there are so many vacancies and inexperienced staff in high level administrative positions, and that institutional knowledge is being lost. The Union was unaware that the Board did not know that Library Services Assistants are not receiving longevity pay for their time as Circulation Assistants.

Health and safety concerns include mice at Cockeysville, water main breaks, and HVAC issues at Parkville.

Labor Management Committee discussions have been productive. Current issues include staff not receiving pay increments on time; temporary positions not having an introductory period; management accountability around core competencies; staff ability to go to internal interviews on work time; consistency of part-time staff hours; and the need for guidance around what to do if you are stalked by a customer.

Ms. Cheikh complimented Ms. Jackson on her report.

Capital Projects Dashboard

Mr. Hartzell reviewed the Capital Projects Dashboard. The Woodlawn renovation is progressing, and time-lapse video was shared on social media. The lower-level stairs to the Loch Raven Branch meeting room need repair. This project is currently going to bid, and the meeting room is unavailable until the project is completed. Work should begin soon on the installation of a new digital sign at Rosedale.

Statistical Dashboard

Ms. Gamertsfelder reviewed the Statistical Dashboard. Technology sessions have decreased because of the temporary closure of the computer lab at North Point as part of the HVAC replacement, and the reduction in available computers at Woodlawn. Ms. Gamertsfelder also shared statistics specific to the Woodlawn temporary location that provided a visualization of the drop off in use between the full branch and temporary location.

Ms. Walsh David asked if the teens were continuing to visit the library after school, Ms. Cheikh asked about the impact to summer meals, and Dr. Lin-Chen asked about using the vans from Mobile Services to bolster service. While Ms. Gamertsfelder was unable to answer these questions, Mr. Wolf and Mr. White, Regional Managers attending the meeting as observers, shared that while some teens were using the branch after school, many did not want to travel the distance to the temporary location, but there has been an uptick in use by vulnerable adults. Woodlawn staff have increased the number of Lunch and Learn sessions at area schools, and a plan for serving lunch is being developed. One of the biggest impacts of the closure is a significant increase in business at the Rosedale Storyville with as many as 300 visitors a day.

Strategic Plan XI Update

Ms. Gamertsfelder reviewed the Operational Plan progress report for the second quarter of FY 2026. BCPL has already surpassed the goal for the third quarter for Foster a Love of Reading and Discovery with the Be Well Read Challenge for adults and record school sign-ups for Battle of the Books.

Ms. Walsh David asked about the current partner providing legal services. Legal services are provided by the Community Law Center as well as other partners.

Board Report

Ms. Cheikh wished staff a happy New Year and welcomed Ms. Baker.

Ms. Cheikh expressed the Boards congratulations to Mr. Cooke on his upcoming retirement and shared that the Board will be issuing a Request for Information as part of appointing an interim Executive Director. A Request for Proposal will be issued to engage a search firm to find a permanent Executive Director. Staff participation will be part of the hiring process.

Ms. Cheikh will be appointing a Bylaws Committee to update language in the bylaws to reflect the change in title from CEO to Executive Director.

OLD BUSINESS

Closed Session Report

Ms. Cheikh reported that during the Closed Session on January 8, 2026, the Board discussed a personnel issue and authorized Human Resources to act.

NEW BUSINESS

Approval of the FY 2027 Draft Budget

Ms. Rowe shared that the FY 2027 budget request is a 3.11% total increase over the FY 2026 budget. The General Fund request from Baltimore County is increasing by 4%; State Aid is anticipated to increase by 3.03%, and the request includes the use of \$1 million in prior fund balance.

Special Funds, which includes grant funds and branch revenue, have decreased by \$255,000 due to a decrease in grant income of \$200,000. Grant expenses are also budgeted to decrease by \$200,000.

Expenses are primarily increasing in salaries by 3% and benefits by 6.33%. Expenses for benefits include active and retiree medical costs and retirement costs, and the budget numbers are set by Baltimore County.

Ms. Rowe requested that the Board approve the Draft FY 2027 Budget Request and authorized the Board Finance Committee to review and approve any future changes that may be needed as the budget process moves forward. BCPL's stage 1 meeting with the County is scheduled, and the final FY 2027 Budget will be presented at the February Board meeting.

The Board approved Ms. Rowe's request to allow the Finance Committee to make any necessary changes to the draft document **(Cruz/Walsh David)**.

Award of Contract – Summer Reading T-Shirts

The Board awarded the contract for Summer Reading T-Shirts (FRP 2026-P-02) to Adwear & Specialty of Texas, Inc. for \$56,568.63 **(Walsh David/Cruz)**.

Board Policy Action – Appointment of Employees

The Board revoked the authority given to the CEO in 2024 to appoint all employees. The Executive Director will no longer have the authority to appoint employees above the grade of Branch Manager **(Walsh David/Lin-Chen)**.

FY 2027 MOU with IAMAW (Romney)

Ms. Romney discussed progress on the FY 2027 MOU with IAMAW. Discussion is ongoing around a Multilingual Pay Policy and Longevity Pay. The Board will vote on the MOU until the February meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:49 am **(Lin-Chen/Walsh David)**.

Submitted by

Claudia Cruz

Secretary to the Board of Library Trustees

2026-7