

BOARD OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

January 21, 2025

A meeting of the Board of Library Trustees was held on Tuesday, January 21, 2025, via Zoom. 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, Anne West, and Michael Netzer.

Staff in attendance: Sonia Alcántara-Antoine, Chief Executive Officer; James Cooke, Chief Operations Officer; Jen Evans, Executive Assistant; Emily Gamertsfelder, Planning & Projects Manager; Michael Jackson, Essex Library Manager; Robin Linton, Human Resources Director; and Helen Rowe, Fiscal Services Director.

COMMUNICATION

Minutes

The Board approved the minutes of the November 21, 2024, meeting (**Walsh David/Netzer**) and the January 3, 2025, meeting (**Walsh David/West**).

Correspondence

None.

Upcoming Events

Winter Reading Challenge ends on January 31. To date, there are 930 registrants compared to 430 last year. Celebrate Lunar New Year February 1st at Cockeysville. This program includes a visit with author Grace Lin and a Lunar New Year Festival.

Comments from the Public

None.

REPORTS

CEO's Report (Alcántara-Antoine)

Two community engagement sessions were held at the Essex Branch for the new Essex library. Sessions were well attended, with diverse participation among the Essex community. Participants were asked to dream big when sharing what they wanted or needed in a new library. Quinn Evans Architects has been chosen to develop the design based on community feedback. The design will inform the size, scope, and the cost of the project. Once the design is completed, work will begin towards gaining full funding for the project.

The CEO introduced Mr. Michael Jackson, the new Essex Library Manager.

Statistical Dashboard – Gamertsfelder

Ms. Gamertsfelder shared the Statistical Dashboards from November and December of 2024. Ms. Walsh David expressed her appreciation for BCPL's commitment to virtual materials. Dr. Lin Chen asked if the circulation statistics for virtual material could be broken out for comparison. The rest of the Board concurred. Ms. Gamertsfelder will assess making that change for future reports. The Board asked Ms. Gamertsfelder to explain the difference between active accounts and total accounts. Active accounts have used a library card within the last 12 months, total accounts show the number of card holders in the database. The database is purged of inactive accounts every three years as required by the State.

Operations (Cooke)

Mr. Cooke thanked Mr. Jackson, Mr. Hartzell, and other staff for their participation in the successful Essex Library community engagement sessions. Mr. Hartzell is also working on an update of meeting rooms at Arbutus, Cockeyville, and North Point. The construction start date for the renovation of the Woodlawn Library has been pushed back to late summer due to permitting issues. BCPL is working the County Property Management on securing the permits needed. The renovation of the meeting room and bathrooms at the White Marsh Library and the installation of new outdoor digital signage should begin soon.

It is anticipated that BCPL will receive \$250,000 of State Capital Grant funding for the replacement of the HVAC system at North Point. The anticipated total cost of the project is \$4.5 million. The Digital Equity and Virtual Services Department has secured \$100,000 in grant funding for Digital Literacy training, and to refresh the mobile laptop labs.

Human Resources (Linton)

Ms. Linton reported that as of December 2024, BCPL has 530 employees with seven separations taking place over November and December. Human Resources has filled one of the vacancies for Social Workers and hopes to fill the remaining position soon. In addition to recruitment, Human Resources has been working on end-of-year processes, negotiating with the Union, and developing a Heat Related Illness Policy.

Fiscal Services (Rowe)

Revenues remain slightly above expenses. This is primarily due to investments and filling vacant positions. BCPL staff began receiving their COLA this month and this will also reduce the variance between revenues and expenses.

Ms. Walsh David was pleased that there were so few vacancies, as this shows that BCPL is a desirable workplace.

Board Report (Cheikh)

Ms. Cheikh wished BCPL leadership and staff a Happy New Year. As BCPL looks towards the New Year, we must remember the important role libraries play in forging our democracy. BCPL provides resources for our County to learn, create, and grow. This past month board members attended informational sessions, brainstorming sessions, and community input sessions with the architects designing the new Essex branch. Together with the community, the Board and library leaders will advocate for funding for what will be a transformative civic institution in Essex. She also offered sincere congratulations to Mike Jackson on his appointment as Essex Branch Manager.

A glance at the events at various libraries across the County shows a wide variety of programs that provide tools to help residents engage the world successfully.

The board is so excited for Legislative Day, February 11th. While Ms. Cheikh is unable to attend, the Board will be well represented by Dr. Lin-Chen, Ms. Cruz, Ms. Ganguly, Ms. Walsh David, and Ms. West. They join the CEO and staff in Annapolis for conversations with legislators; to remind them of the vital resources the library provides in their districts and the needs of BCPL moving forward.

Moving into 2025, BCPL will face fiscal, personal, and public challenges. BCPL rejects any manifesto that institutionalizes censorship and paves the way for greater political control over collections. The Board and BCPL remains committed to the Freedom to Read and encouraging digital literacy so that our residents can confidently recognize news that is accurate and reliable.

Ms. Cheikh shared how transformative reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a young girl was. The book transported her to a room in which darkness enveloped every action. She reminded everyone that in the year ahead when we feel that libraries are under attack for the access to ideas they provide and the democratic values they espouse, we should remember Anne's extraordinary words, "Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness." The Board is committed to amplifying BCPL's light in the days ahead.

Ms. Cheikh shared that at the November 21, 2024, and January 3, 2025, closed sessions, the Board discussed personnel matters and did not vote on any actions. Minutes of the closed session were adopted.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Award of Contract – Summer Reading T-Shirts (Rowe)

The Board awarded a contract for Summer Reading T-Shirts to Rocky Coast Printworks for \$55,316.00 (**West/Walsh David**). Ms. Cheikh clarified for the new Board members that contracts over \$50,000 go to the Board for approval.

CLOSED SESSION AND ADJOURNMENT

At 8:38 am Ms. Cheikh called for a motion to close the public portion of the meeting under General Provisions Article § 3-305 (b) to consider matters related to collective bargaining negotiation (Ganguly/Walsh David) and to adjourn the meeting from the Closed Session. Aye: Cheikh, Cruz, Ganguly, Lin-Chen, Netzer, Walsh David, and West. The staff members present at the Closed Session were CEO Alcántara-Antoine and Ms. Linton. Cornerstone lobbyist Mr. Bernie Marczyk was also present. A summary statement for the Closed Session will be shared at the next Board meeting anticipated to be on February 18, 2025.

Submitted by

Claudia Cruz

Secretary to the Board of Library Trustees