

BOARD OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

February 18, 2025

A meeting of the Board of Library Trustees was held on Tuesday, February 18, 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, and Pamela Lin-Chen. Anne West joined the meeting at 8:05. Michael Netzer was absent.

Staff in attendance: Sonia Alcántara-Antoine, Chief Executive Officer; Ann Beegle, Philanthropy and Partnerships; Laurie Carl, Regional Manager; Jen Evans, Executive Assistant; Emily Gamertsfelder, Planning & Projects Manager; Cassie Miller, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director; Robin Linton, Human Resources Director; and Helen Rowe, Fiscal Services Director.

COMMUNICATION

Minutes

The Board approved the minutes of the January 21, 2025, meeting **(Walsh David/Cruz)**.

Ms. West arrived.

Correspondence

None.

Upcoming Events

The CEO highlighted the Black Business Pop-up Fair at Randallstown on February 22 and Evening of the Arts at Randallstown on February 28. Tickets for Colson Whitehead at will be available starting February 24 and save the date for An Afternoon with Chris Bohjalian on March 16 at Perry Hall.

Comments from the Public

None.

REPORTS

CEO's Report (Alcántara-Antoine)

In her report, the CEO shared that Baltimore County Public Library believes in the inherent worth of all people, regardless of their immigration status, gender, sexual orientation, race, economic background, religion, or political beliefs. BCPL is open to everyone, and serves all with kindness, compassion, and dignity. Despite the changes in the federal government, BCPL's mission, vision, and values remain steadfast. The CEO reaffirmed BCPL's commitment to supporting the entire community and upholding BCPL's core values, which include equal access and intellectual freedom; our customers and communities; and diversity and inclusion.

The past month has been challenging. The news that all federal grants and assistance programs were on pause was shocking and unexpected. This order was rescinded just two days later, but not before causing widespread alarm and consternation among every local and state government, school and institution of higher education, and community-based organization (like public libraries) that rely on federal dollars to carry out their mandates. Thankfully, less than one percent of BCPL's budget is federally funded, and the impact would have been small. BCPL will need to be hyperalert to the impact of future funding freezes on our bottom line.

BCPL's Philanthropy and Partnerships Department has been diligently applying for many grants, including federal grants and appropriations. The current administration's anti-DEI, anti-LGBTQ and anti-immigrant stance means that future federal funding for BCPL's DEI or digital equity initiatives will be in jeopardy. BCPL will sunset the high-speed router portion of the long-term lending initiative because of a change in federal funding and will instead focus on expanding the collection of wi-fi hotspots and Chromebooks at the same time as it is seeking out alternate sources of funding. BCPL will continue to work towards eradicating digital inequity in Baltimore County.

The CEO advocates at the local and state levels. She was pleased to share that she will participate in Voices for Libraries, a federal advocacy event, as a member of the Maryland State Library and the Urban Libraries Council delegations. It has never been more important for librarians, trustees, and library users to advocate for funding and support for public libraries.

Ms. Cheikh expressed her appreciation for the leadership of the CEO.

Fiscal Services Report and FY 26 Budget Update (Rowe)

Increased salary costs from the implementation of last month's Cost of Living Adjustment, and rising costs for energy and security necessitated the use of Fund Balance.

Ms. Cheikh asked if the County supplemented the energy budget when costs exceed the estimate, and they do not.

Ms. Rowe shared that FY 2026 would be a tight budget year for Baltimore County. Ms. Rowe and the CEO will continue to advocate for an increase in BCPL's budget.

Statistical Dashboard – Gamertsfelder

Ms. Gamertsfelder shared the Statistical Dashboard. While BCPL's numbers are on track, the winter sees slowdown in use.

Dr. Lin-Chen asked how BCPL defines a wi-fi session. Ms. Gamertsfelder shared that a transfer of data is required to count as a session, not just a device being registered by the network.

Operational Plan and FY 27 Strategic Plan (Gamertsfelder)

Ms. Gamertsfelder reviewed BCPL's progress towards Strategic Plan goals over the past quarter. She shared a few highlights including: Enhance Economic Vitality – 1,300 customers attended the Pop-Up Shops held at three branches in December; Connect Customers to Services- the

Baltimore County Digital Equity Taskforce, of which BCPL is a member, was awarded the Visionary Trailblazer award from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance and a social worker was hired for the west region.

BCPL will be issuing a Request for Proposal for a consultant to work with staff on the next Strategic Plan. This will allow for greater stakeholder input.

Ms. Cheikh was very complimentary of the work done to achieve the Strategic Plan goals.

DEI Report (Miller)

The Board received a written DEI report from Ms. Miller filed with the Board packet.

Foundation Report (Beegle)

Ms. Beegle reviewed the Foundation Report. The Foundation has retained CCS Fundraising to review donor data and help pinpoint additional opportunities to enhance fundraising, prioritize prospects, and retain donors. Fundraising revenue increased significantly from FY 21 to FY 22. There was a decline in donations in FY 23-FY 24, and overall donor count had a similar decline. The Foundation will continue to work with the information provided by CCS Fundraising to increase revenue and donor generation over the next year.

Human Resources and Collective Bargaining Update (Linton)

Ms. Linton shared highlights of her written report to the Board. BCPL currently has 525 active employees and eleven open positions. Human Resources continues to recruit staff to fill the vacancies. End-of-year processing was especially labor intensive this year. Human Resources has requested funding in the FY 26 budget to explore more robust versions of existing software solutions to improve workflows.

In her Labor Relations Report, Ms. Linton shared that there has been open communication and collaboration over the past year, resulting in few grievances. There was a single grievance that went to arbitration, and it was decided in BCPL's favor. The Labor/Management Committee continues to be used to address concerns collaboratively. The Committee is working on a Bilingual Pay Policy and a policy to address heat related illness. Dr. Lin-Chen asked for clarification around bilingual pay. This would be additional pay for staff who use their skills in a second language during work tasks. Ms. Linton shared that BCPL has reached a tentative agreement on all items posed by BCPL and IAMAW during contract negotiations.

Board Report (Cheikh)

Ms. Cheikh thanked all the BCPL staff and Board members who participated in Library Legislative Day in Annapolis. This was a day to advocate on library issues, establish relationships, and share future hopes for BCPL.

Many of BCPL's hopes moving forward rely on funding from Baltimore County but also additional sources of funding. Ms. Cheikh recognized Ms. Beegle's strategic approach to modernizing the Foundation's development systems and thanked her and her team. BCPL's

Donors are growing and giving more during the year, and Ms. Beegle is successfully communicating that incredible work and encouraging others to generously help BCPL to grow.

Ms. Cheikh thanked the Human Resources department the summary of their work to date and all those at the table who have been working collaboratively on a future labor agreement.

Building on Ms. Gamertsfelder' s Operational Plan report, Ms. Cheikh thanked BCPL staff for the programming available to Baltimore County residents that impacts diverse and often vulnerable community members. Ms. Cheikh was astounded by the number of programs available across the County in a single day. BCPL staff are reach across the spectrum from books and storytelling to services that change lives. BCPL is a beacon of democratic principles in Baltimore County and the Board is appreciative.

Finally, Ms. Cheikh thanked Ms. Miller and her team who are moving BCPL' s mission from words to action. The work of their department empowers and engages customers, staff, and the Board to be more inclusive and enjoy a more connected Baltimore County. Establishing DEI throughout the fabric of our system is a reminder that we must do better and work harder. In Baltimore County the words Diversity, Equity and Inclusion inspire us and do not divide us.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Policy Update – Study Room Policy (Carl)

The Board approved changes to the Study Room Policy to allow customers to book rooms in advance using the Communico booking platform used by BCPL. The Board requested one change, updating the period allowed for booking a study room to read “withing 24 hours” **(Ganguly/Lin-Chen)**.

CLOSED SESSION

At 9:04 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 to discuss the performance evaluation of an employee and **(Lin-Chen/Cruz)**. Aye: Cheikh, Cruz, Ganguly, Lin-Chen, Walsh David, and West. Mr. Netzer was absent. The staff members present at the Closed Session during the collective bargaining discussion were CEO Alcántara-Antoine and Ms. Linton.

After returning to open session at 10:22 am, the Board ratified their decision to approve the MOU for FY 2026 with IAMAW and approved the evaluation of the CEO as discussed in closed session **(Cruz/Ganguly)**.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:24 am **(Walsh David/Ganguly)**.

Submitted by

Claudia Cruz

Secretary to the Board of Library Trustees