

Kent County Public Library Board of Trustees

Board Meeting Minutes of April 29th, 2025

Call to Order

Present:

Rachel Durso , President; **Melissa Walters** , Vice President; **John Murphy** , Treasurer; **Erin Counihan** , Secretary; **Clara Rankin** , Trustee; **Robert Bell** , Executive Director; **Chris Walmsley** , Director of Office Administration; **Tobi Brown** , Executive Secretary

Ms. Durso called the meeting into order at 4:31pm.

Ms. Durso noted that there were three absent trustees. With a quorum present, business could move forward.

Disposition of Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed. Mr. Murphy moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Ms. Walters seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Review of Agenda

The agenda for the meeting was reviewed. Ms. Counihan proposed the closed session be postponed due to trustee absences. The trustees agreed and decided to move the closed session to the May 27th meeting.

Public Comment

Ms. Durso noted that there were no members of the public present.

Open Meeting Act Training

Mr. Murphy led the Maryland Open Meetings Act Training for the board. Mr. Murphy reviewed information regarding closed meetings, public meeting involvement, and the transparency of meeting information.

Mr. Murphy expressed concern about the absence of the Board Meeting Agenda on the KCPL website. Mr. Walmsley noted that meeting agendas could be found in the KCPL online event calendar and were posted in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. Ms. Counihan demonstrated how to find the agenda on the KCPL website. Mr. Murphy agreed the agenda was compliant and no changes were made.

Ms. Rankin arrived after the start of the meeting at 4:38.

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Officer Reports

Treasurer

Mr. Murphy reviewed the bank balances and noted that there was \$114,891 in the PNC Checking account, \$32,846 in the PNC Money Market account, and \$219,382 in the Peoples Bank Savings account. Mr. Murphy noted the library is in good financial standing.

Mr. Murphy noted that Mr. Bell will be presenting the FY2026 Budget Proposal presentation to the County Commissioners at a meeting on Tuesday, May 6th.

Secretary

Ms. Counihan thanked everyone for submitting information for the upcoming newsletter. Ms. Counihan asked the trustees to participate in a photo at the end of the meeting.

Ms. Counihan shared that KCPL emails have been set up for the trustees. Ms. Counihan asked if the trustees wanted to use the KCPL emails for trustee communications. The trustees discussed their options. Mr. Murphy advised testing the KCPL emails to gauge trustee responsiveness. Ms. Rankin proposed the option of using their preferred email.

Ms. Counihan noted the upcoming formal evaluation of KCPL Executive Director Mr. Bell, taking place at the end of the 2025 fiscal year. Mr. Counihan noted that the evaluation will be based on the position description previously established by the trustees in tandem with the KCPL Senior Staff. Ms. Counihan expressed interest in receiving feedback from the Friends of the Kent County Public Library, the Foundation of the Kent County Public Library, and the KCPL staff before the Trustees come to a decision.

Friends of the Kent County Public Library

Ms. Rankin noted the Friends of the Kent County Public Library successful preparations for the Annual Spring Book Sale on May 16th - May 18th.

Foundation for the Kent County Public Library

Ms. Durso reviewed the April 25th meeting of the Foundation for the Kent County Public Library in Ms. Westerland's absence. Ms. Durso shared that the Foundation had money in hand and that the meeting allowed new colleagues to make connections with each other. Mr. Bell shared the proposal he made to the Foundation of the Kent County Public Library for a semi-permanent covering over the patio at the Chestertown branch.

Ms. Durso shared the information she provided to the Foundation regarding the defunding of the IMLS. Ms. Durso explained to the Foundation that though the direct

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impact of this defunding on KCPL will be limited, the Library will likely seek additional support from stakeholder groups.

Ms. Durso shared that the town of Millington is looking to establish a library within the town limits. Mr. Bell informed the trustees that the town of Millington has requested assistance from KCPL, however Mr. Bell stated that KCPL did not currently possess the capacity to aid in the operation and staffing of a new library location. Mr. Bell added that he is considering alternative ways for KCPL to assist Millington.

Reports of Committees

Strategic Planning Committee

The committee is looking to create a streamlined and action-oriented plan that includes the input from stakeholders. Ms. Durso stated the Strategic Planning Committee will be meeting on May 22nd at 5pm. Ms. Durso stated that a member of the Friends of the Kent County Public Library has offered to assist with the strategic plan.

Safety Committee

Ms. Durso has not yet called a meeting for the Safety Committee. Ms. Durso noted that she will call a meeting after the FY2026 Budget Proposal Presentation, as the outcome of the proposal will inform some decisions regarding safety concerns.

Mr. Bell shared his recent conversations with Chief Dixon of the Chestertown Police Department (CPD). Chief Dixon reassured Mr. Bell that he would be in attendance of the FY2026 Budget Proposal on May 6th to speak on the current Library safety concerns. Mr. Bell also expressed interest in Chief Dixon's attendance of future safety meetings or staff training.

Ms. Rankin asked if there had been a discussion about non-voting members of the Safety Committee. Ms. Durso confirmed that there was a discussion at the previous meeting.

Chestertown Library Inc. Building Committee

Mr. Bell information from Jay Silcox about the progress of the Chestertown Library Inc. Building. Mr. Silcox informed Mr. Bell that an architect was finalizing plans and the items inside the building were ready to move to bid.

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Executive Director Report

Staff Updates

Mr. Bell informed the trustees that the two newest hires, Ms. Lila Ingersoll and Mx. Tobi Brown, are performing well. Mr. Bell noted that the staff member who is on leave remains on leave and is expected to return soon.

Branch Updates

Mr. Bell reviewed updates for the branches. Mr. Bell noted that programming at both branches is well attended and the setup of the Rock Hall branch is nearly completed. Mr. Bell expressed interest in replacing the outdated signage at the North County branch.

Safety Updates

Mr. Bell shared the success of incorporating police presence in the library. Mr. Bell noted a few communication issues between KCPL staff and CPD, however Mr. Bell assured the trustees that these miscommunications were being worked on.

Mr. Bell reviewed his discussion with Chief Dixon regarding a recent incident regarding a trespassed patron. Mr. Bell shared that if a trespassed individual comes onto KCPL property to receive information regarding their trespass, Chief Dixon and Mr. Bell are both inclined to hold off on contacting CPD unless the individual repeatedly violates the trespass order or poses an immediate threat to others. Mr. Bell also noted that Chief Dixon stated that contacting CPD is ultimately up to KCPL staff's discretion and that the non-emergency number is also available to KCPL staff.

Ms. Rankin advised that having KCPL staff note the date, time, and duration of each trespass interaction, with periodic reporting to police, may prevent an estoppel claim if the police are not going to be called for each instance.

ESRL/Hoopla Updates

Mr. Bell shared that the Easter Shore Regional Library (ESRL) has decided to keep Hoopla as a service, with a budget reduction of \$250,000 to \$200,000. Mr. Bell shared that moving forward Hoopla will have a maximum of 6 checkouts and an item budget of \$2.99 per item. Mr. Bell discussed some of the other service changes within ESRL, including the loss of CollectionHQ, a collection evaluation tool. Mr. Bell informed the trustees that KCPL was one of only two libraries utilizing the service across ESRL and its services are not affordable in the KCPL budget.

IMLS Update

Mr. Bell reviewed recent developments surrounding the defunding of the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Mr. Bell shared that 21 State Attorney Generals

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were currently suing the Administration for the defunding of the IMLS, with a prospective court date of April 30th. Mr. Bell also noted that the State librarian has expressed their cautious optimism for the court's outcome.

FY2026 Budget Proposal Presentation

Mr. Bell shared the support he's received concerning the upcoming FY2026 Budget Proposal presentation. Mr. Bell noted a list of constituents planning to attend the meeting.

Mr. Bell presented the current rough draft of the FY2026 Budget Proposal presentation to the trustees. Mr. Murphy asked how long the presentation would take to present. Mr. Bell noted that the meeting allotted 20-30 minutes for the presentation. Mr. Bell expressed confidence in his ability to make it through the presentation in the time provided.

Mr. Bell explained the breakdown of the FY2026 Budget, including the \$30,000 shortfall in the FY2026 benefits and a \$7,000 shortfall in payroll. Mr. Bell stated that the budget will be asking for a one-time money increase of \$50,000. Mr. Murphy asked if the replacement of the Chestertown branch security cameras was a part of this one-time request. Mr. Bell answered that the cost of the security was only partially covered. Ms. Durso noted a recent focus on public safety in Kent County and neighboring counties.

Mr. Bell noted that in recent conversation, the Kent County Administrator was optimistic about the outcome of the Budget presentation.

Mr. Bell requested to attend the next Board of Trustees meeting on May 27th, virtually.

Old Business

Holiday Closures Changes

Mr. Bell requested to eliminate partial holiday closures from the calendar year and instead opt to have all KCPL locations fully open or fully closed.

Mr. Bell noted that both the Rock Hall and North County branches are not open during partial closures and the Chestertown branch door counts are typically low. Mr. Bell noted that the KCPL staff was in favor of a full close on Indigenous People's Day and full open on Veterans Day.

Mr. Murphy moved to approve the newly established holiday closure schedule. Ms. Counihan seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

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Circulation Manual/Staff Handbook Request

Mr. Bell stated that the new draft of the Circulation Manual and the Staff Handbook would be completed by mid-June. Mr. Bell noted that he will be sending out a final draft to the trustees for discussion at the June 30th Board of Trustees meeting.

New Business

Branch Extended Hours Request

Mr. Bell noted that the Rock Hall and North County branches both close at 4:00pm on Fridays, while the Chestertown branch is open until 5:00pm. The trustees discussed the current state of the Friday hours and how the arrangement came about.

Mr. Bell proposed changing the Rock Hall and North County branch closing times on Fridays to 5:00pm. Mr. Murphy asked if this addition would impact staffing. Mr. Bell said it would not.

Mr. Murphy moved to approve the extension of branch hours. Ms. Rankin seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Closed Session

The trustees deferred the closed session until the following meeting, due to trustee absences. Ms. Durso mentioned the Executive committee had already been discussing the personnel topics.

Adjournment

No further business was brought before the trustees.

Mr. Murphy moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Coughlin seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:23 pm.